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Chat

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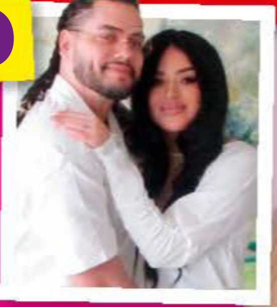
But I'm banned from BONKING my own hubby



I TOLD POLICE MY BRO WAS A RAPIST

and then they offered him a job

DUMMIES TO DUMB-BELLS

My son's been lifting since ***HE WAS 2***

SUPER SLIMMER

I'm 18st DOWN

thanks to five little words

TIME TO SHINE!

SIZES 6-32
PARTY LOOKS FROM £8

PLUS! *Fab ideas for festive leftovers*

18 PUZZLES

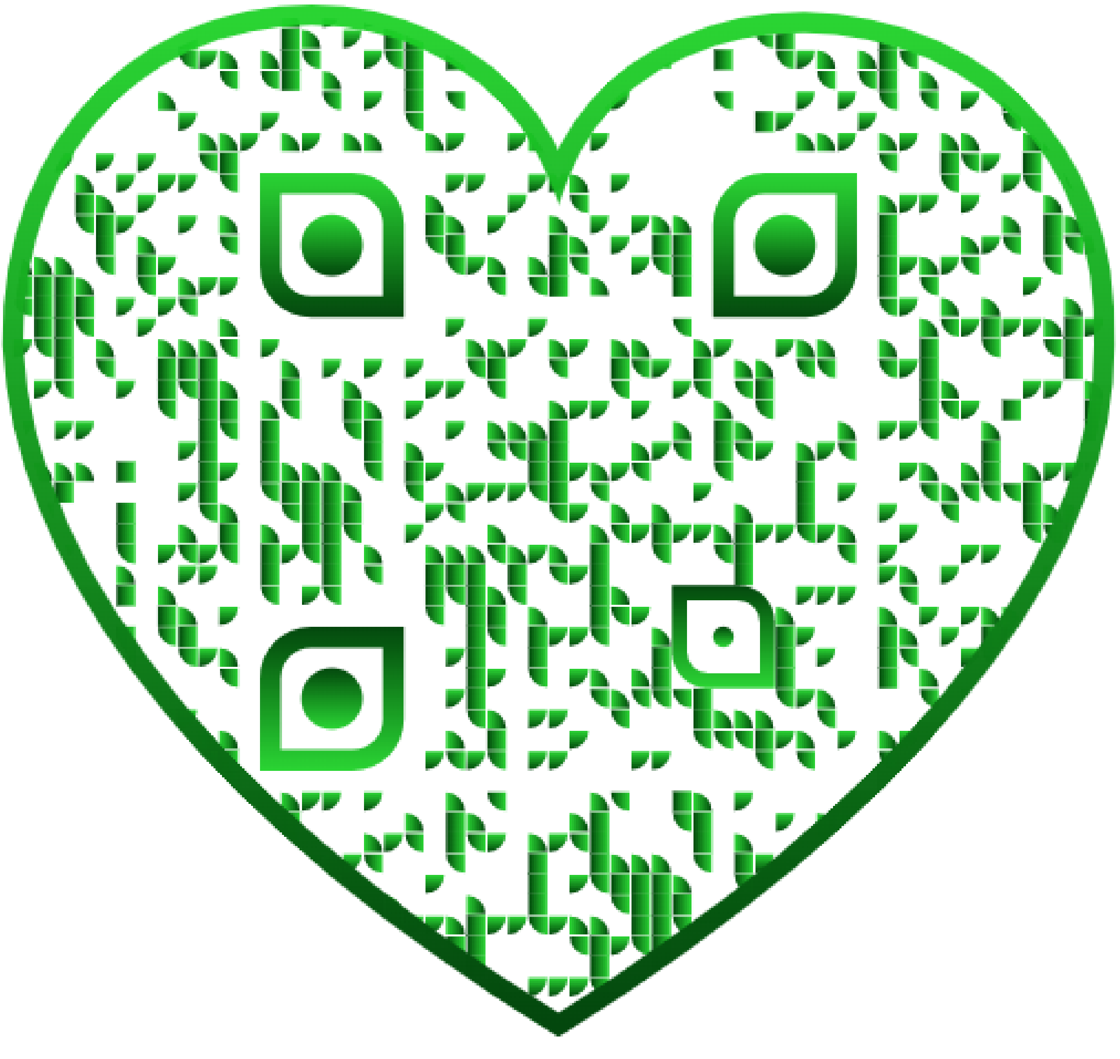
45 CASH PRIZES
UK only

FUTURE

I couldn't save her

BRUTE MURDERED MY GIRL THEN KEPT ON STABBING

I warned Laura that monster would kill her – how I wish I hadn't been right



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Come on in!

Welcome to this week's *Chat*...

Dating apps were supposed to make finding love easier. It's how I met my husband – but pals who are still signed up tell me using them is now a pain. Same old faces, cringey messages, cancelled dates…

I'll make sure they read Helen's story this week (**p58**). She's had some dating shockers but she has definitely managed to find the funny side. If you've got a dating story to share – good or bad! – please let us know.

Have a great week,

Kate Williams, Editor

PS If you're entering the puzzles online, this is the link to use: comps.lifedeathprizes.com/puzzles

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COVER PHOTOS (MAIN POSED BY MODEL): SHUTTERSTOCK, FUTURE STUDIOS, CLEVELAND POLICE, FOCUS FEATURES

Chat to us!

What have you been up to now?

Me and my bridesmaid, my sister Louise. She's not only my sister but my best friend in the world and I couldn't do life without her.
Jo Dunn, Wymondham

Isn't my godson Noel, 2, an adorable tweetie pie in the penguin hat I bought him? He loves a candy cane, too!
Gillian Jackson, Todmorden

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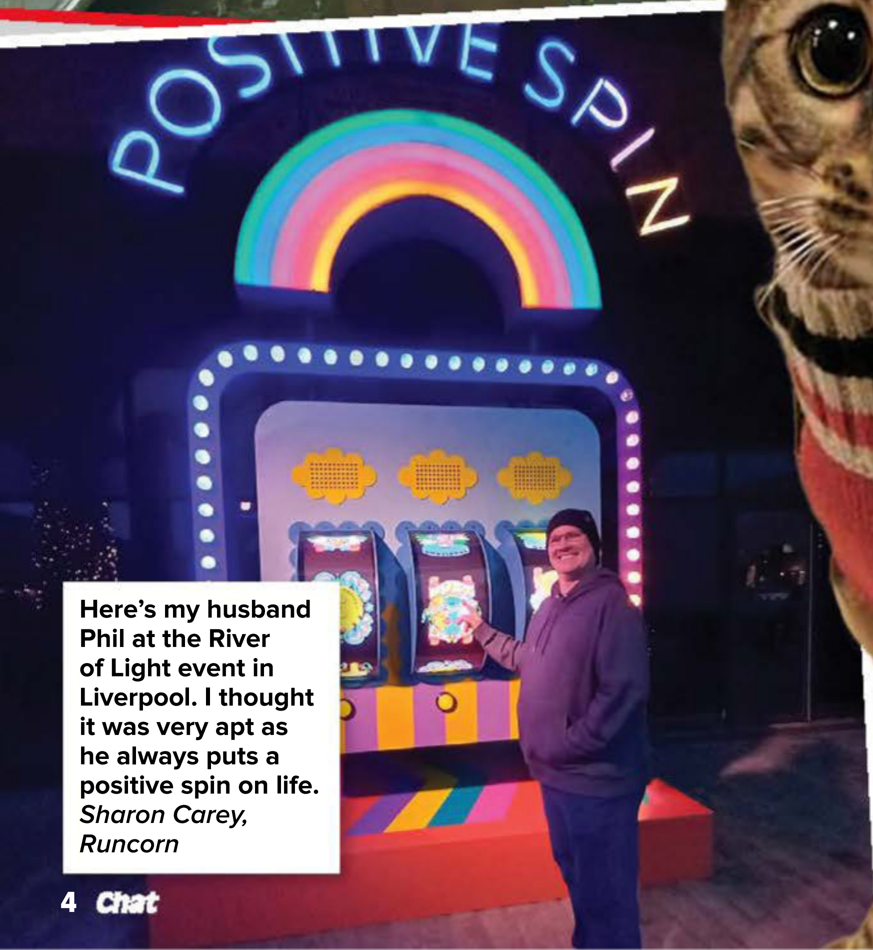
Chat To U



Here's my husband Phil at the River of Light event in Liverpool. I thought it was very apt as he always puts a positive spin on life.
Sharon Carey, Runcorn

During the colder months, our Bengal kitten Jade needs an extra layer to keep her toasty.
Lucy Hill, Halifax

My incredible granddaughter Millie, 16, did a skydive on her birthday to raise funds for the charity Child Bereavement UK. We're all so proud of her.
Sandra Couper, Newark

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5
otos
e on
s!

Arno, our cheeky pup, has 'snow' much fun in winter!
Caoimha Farren, Derry

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The Chatty Cafe Scheme

Get the kettle on!

This week we meet…

Steph O'Shea, 33, from Burntwood.

Coffee or tea in the morning?

I'm a coffee drinker and need two cups before I feel human! I'll have a gingerbread latte first thing, followed by a regular decaf with a splash of sugar-free vanilla syrup and skimmed milk.

What's your favourite film?

Angela's Ashes as I have Irish roots. My dad emigrated to Birmingham from Ireland as a child. The stories he and my nan told me, about how tough life was, are very much represented in this moving film.

Dream winter holiday destination?

Iceland, even though I'm not a fan of freezing temperatures. But to be surrounded by snow, sledging and staying in a remote cabin with an open fire with my partner and children would be worth it. Especially if we got to see the Northern Lights too.

What was your favourite childhood toy?

My lime green Nintendo Game Boy. Games were really expensive so me and my friends used to swap cartridges.

Any New Year's resolutions?

Yes! To be less self-critical, make the most of each day, be more spontaneous and live in the now.

WE PAY £50 to everyone we feature on this page!

JOIN IN!

Chat is proud to work with The Chatty Cafe Scheme, which hosts free weekly Chatter & Natter tables in cafes across the country. The aim is to get people talking and reduce loneliness along the way. Find your nearest Chatty Cafe, become a phone volunteer, or set up your own Chatter & Natter table at **thechattycafescheme.co.uk**

WORDS: LOUISE BATY

Force of e

My policeman brother thought he was above the law. He was

Alodie Mitchell, 21, London

Little white pins formed a neat row, like soldiers standing to attention.

'Ready, aim, fire!' I said, swinging the computer controller, knocking them down in one go.

'Strike!' I cheered.

It was 2013, and me and my brother Cliff, then 13, were bowling on the Nintendo Wii.

Aged 10, I was three years younger than Cliff.

But he was my best mate.

'Good shot,' he said, high-fiving me.

I loved having a big brother.

Someone to play games with, someone to look out for me.

We shared a bedroom, me on the bottom bunk, him on the top, giggling long into the night with silly jokes.

But the following year, in 2014, things changed.

'Let's play another game,' Cliff suggested one night.

Leaning me against our bunk bed, he tugged down my trousers and knickers.

Forced himself inside me.

Pain seared through my body.

Still so young, I didn't understand what he was doing.

Only knew that I didn't like it.

'Don't tell Mum and Dad,' Cliff warned afterwards.

I was too scared to fight back

I nodded, did as I was told.

Cliff acted as if nothing had happened, but I couldn't.

I avoided him as much as possible.

Stopped playing computer games with him, stayed out of our bedroom.

But at night, I had to sleep.

That's when he pounced.

Creeping into my bunk in the still of night, while our parents slept.

I was too scared to fight back, too confused to tell anyone.

So young, I didn't understand what he was doing

It happened again and again.

The brother I once knew had disappeared, replaced by a monster.

Aged 13, I learnt about sex at school.

I'd spent so long unsure, now I knew for certain.

What Cliff was doing was wrong.

'I don't want to,' I said next time it happened.

But Cliff didn't care.

'Don't tell me no,' he snapped.

I was desperate to tell my parents, but I didn't want to break our family.

So I bottled it up.

Then, in 2017, aged 14, I was home alone, doing my homework in the living room, when Cliff marched in.

'Do you want to do it?' he asked.

'No!' I told him.

But Cliff had made up his mind.

He pushed me over the desk chair and forced himself on me.

'Stop!' I pleaded. 'It hurts.'

Afterwards, I felt broken.

Logging into my school homework app, I opened the message section.

It was meant for student support, but I was desperate.

My brother's touching me in places I don't want him to, I wrote.

The next day, a teacher pulled me out of class.

Two police officers were waiting outside, along with my dad.

'We're here because of a report you made,' one officer said.

'Are you OK?' Dad asked.

I nodded slowly.

Told them everything.

Back home, Mum and Dad were in pieces.

'I love you,' Mum said, hugging me.

But although Cliff, then 17, was questioned, he denied everything.

Continued living at home, carried on going to college.

I moved in with a relative to put some distance between us.

Felt happier, free.

After five months, I moved home, but I refused to share a room with Cliff.

Slept on a mattress in Mum and Dad's bedroom.

Terrified of being alone with Cliff, I stayed out day and night with friends.

Swore I'd never let him touch me again.

Then, in August 2019, Cliff received a letter.

'The police have dropped the case,' he laughed, tormenting me.

Said it was due to lack of evidence.

Angry and let down, my mental health spiralled.

Soon after, he cornered me in my parents' bedroom.

'Why did you go to the

Cliff is a dangerous predator

vil
wrong

My brother and me as kids

police?' he asked. 'It was only a bit of fun.'

Horrified, I burst into tears.

Fun? For me it was hell.

And he'd got away with it.

Time passed, Cliff eventually moved out.

As I studied at college and got my first job as a manager at McDonald's, I tried to move on.

Act as if he didn't exist. As if I didn't have a brother.

Then, in 2021, Mum told me Cliff had a new job.

'He's joined the Met Police,' Mum said.

'You're joking?' I gasped.

He should've been locked up, not in a position of power, dealing with vulnerable victims – victims like me.

> **He should've been locked up, not in a position of power**

Sickening.

In March 2022, I met my partner, told him what I'd been through.

The following year, I gave birth to our son.

Then, in September 2023, Dad called.

'Cliff's been arrested for rape,' he said.

I was stunned, but not shocked.

He'd done it again.

Days later, a detective called me.

They'd read Cliff's file and had a question for me.

'Would you like to reopen your case?' she asked.

I agreed.

Anything to stop him.

In December 2023, I was re-interviewed.

Again, he denied everything but he was sacked from the police.

In February 2024, my brother Cliff Mitchell, then 24, appeared at Croydon Crown Court.

I gave evidence from behind a curtain, refusing to be silenced.

The jury found him guilty of three counts of rape of a child under 13 and an additional three counts of rape, all in relation to me.

He was also convicted of a further seven counts of rape, one count of kidnap and breach of a non-molestation order against a second victim.

Even told her no one would believe her because he was a police officer, in what the court heard was a 'brazen abuse of power'.

In total, he'd carried out more than 50 sex attacks against us.

I was horrified and angry.

If I'd been listened to, he'd have been locked up years earlier.

Not parading the streets as a police officer.

In May 2024, he was jailed for life with a minimum term of 13 years and 225 days.

'You are the devil. You disgust me,' I told him in a victim impact statement.

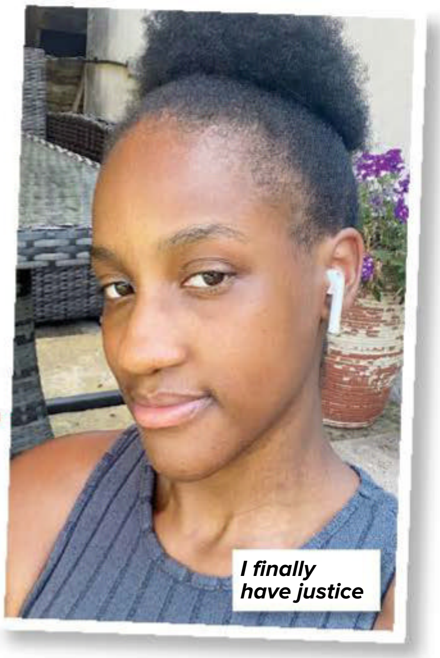
The Court of Appeal later increased his minimum term by four years.

Justice, but it should've come sooner.

I told the police my brother was a dangerous predator, then they offered him a job.

Now that he's finally locked up, I hope they throw away the key.

● **Cliff Mitchell has lodged leave to appeal his conviction.**


I finally have justice

HELP AND SUPPORT

If you've been a victim of sexual assault, visit rapecrisis.org.uk for advice and support.

WORDS: LAUREN GREGORY, JOHANNA BELL. PHOTOS: HOTSPOT MEDIA

Win! £400 cash!

NUMBER JIG

At the time of the 2021 census, how many of those usually resident in the Isles of Scilly were female? Fit these numbers into the grid. One number doesn't fit. This is the prize answer.

3 digits
121
291
~~420~~
425
536
637
648
737
847
848

4 digits
1050
2127
2474
2711
3434
3475
3973
4961
5320
6815
8234
8333
8409
8771

5 digits
11531
11699
28089
32138
39762
40947
56393
67558
73228
77059
78108

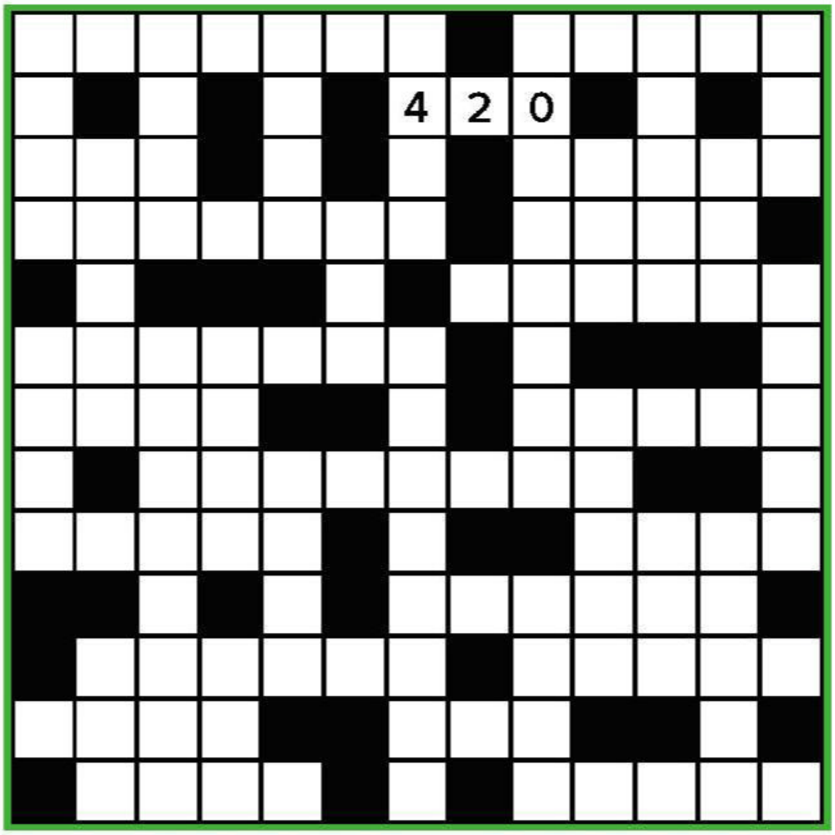
6 digits
487164
582228
658059

7 digits
1934445
4935323
6658658

8 digits
30688278
53934577
86815929
90518083

WIN £200 Puzzle 1

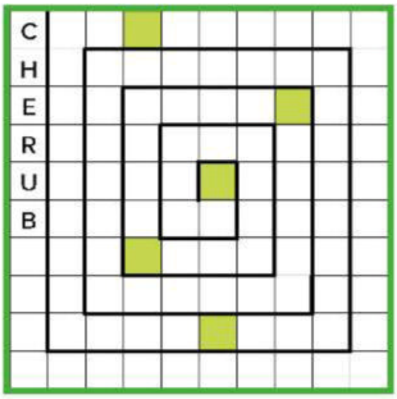
Your answer:



SPIRAL XWORD

In honour of the last North of England-trained horse to win the Derby, what name is given to York Racecourse's May Festival? The answer to each clue (apart from the first) begins with the last letter of the preceding answer. The shaded squares will spell out the one-word prize answer.

WIN £100 Puzzle 2

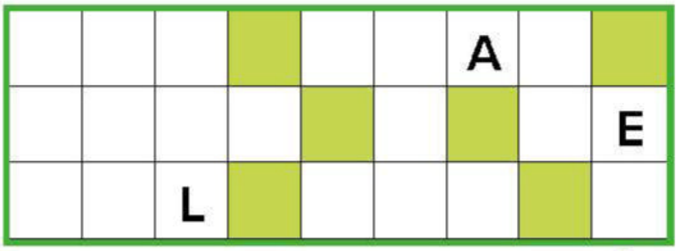


1 Angel (6)
2 Fairground dodgems (6,4)
3 Soft, red fruit (10)
4 Cry or bark of pain (4)
5 Turned over earth for planting (8)
6 _ Smith, TV cook (5)
7 Space traveller (9)
8 Korean martial art similar to karate (9)
9 Speaker (6)
10 Long, red leaf stalks cooked as fruit (7)
11 Item of jewellery (8)
12 Large hairy spider (9)
13 Storybook owner of a magic lamp (7)
14 Vegetarian Sunday lunch option (3,5)
15 Temporary shelter (4)
16 Bird's claw (5)

Your answer:

THREE IN A ROW

An ophidiarium is an enclosure designed to mimic the natural living conditions of what animals? Make three nine-letter words using all of these three-letter sections and enter them in the grid as the starter letters indicate. Then make an anagram of the letters in the shaded squares to form the answer to this question.



INE	VAL	FLA
SHB	ACK	ENT
MIL	KSH	AKE

WIN 5 x £20 Puzzle 3

Your answer:

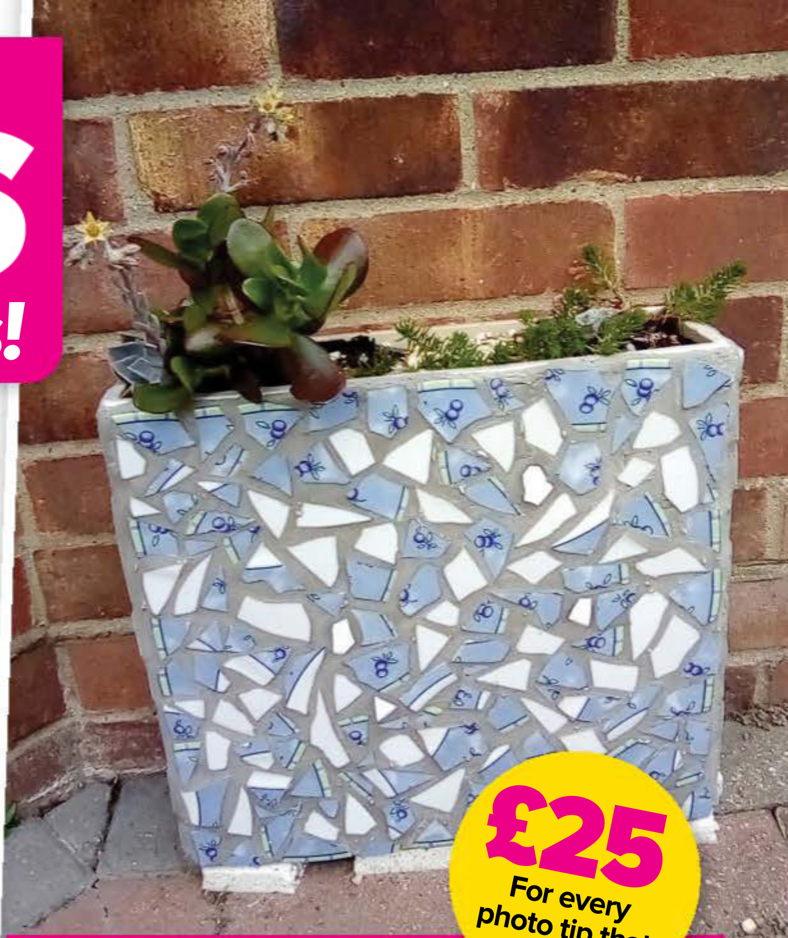
TO ENTER Turn to page 56 for details or visit comps.lifedeathprizes.com/puzzles

Just Genius

Your tips are the tops!

Ice and a slice

I saved the plastic from the inside of an Advent calendar and used it to make ice cubes with pieces of sliced lemon for flavour. Perfect for parties.
Elizabeth Shimmin, Douglas, Isle of Man



£25 For every photo tip that we print

Potty planter

I love upcycling and felt inspired when my neighbour gave me her old toilet cistern. I decorated it with a mosaic made from broken plates and turned it into the perfect planter. Another item saved from landfill.
Cheryl Barwell, Leiston, Suffolk

Bright outlook

I needed new reading glasses but couldn't afford a bling pair. So I bought plain black frames and added my own sparkle with diamante stick-on gems.
Claire Ferris, Studley, Warwickshire

Tag yourself

When it's time to take down the Christmas cards, I don't like chucking them in the recycling bin. Instead, I cut round the Christmas scenes, punch a hole and thread festive string through them to make festive gift tags, ready for next year.
Claire Codling, Halifax, West Yorkshire

Mash marvel

Having trouble scrubbing out the tiny bits of mashed potato from the corners of the masher? Use a clean toothbrush. It does the job, no problem!
Heather Merry, Glasgow

Bottoms up

To clean right to the bottom of a champagne flute, fold a damp microfibre cloth around a knife and rotate the glass. Sparkling in no time… Cheers!
Elizabeth Attwood, Basingstoke, Hampshire

Tips must be your own idea and not appear in other mags. If published, we pay £25 for tips with photos.

Send tips, photos, name and full address to: Tips page, ***Chat***, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR or email us at chat_magazine@futurenet.com. Remember, these are **YOUR** tips – we haven't tried them ourselves

Our chemistry is off the scale

Caged

My soulmate's an inmate, but I'll wait

Andreea Chaparro, 27, London

With a sigh, I flicked off the TV. It was May 2020, two months into the Covid-19 lockdown, and I was stuck at home.

Had watched every true-crime show Netflix had to offer and was bored stiff.

'I need something to do,' I told my mum Geta, then 46.

I lived with her and my dad Alex, then 43.

Had been single for years.

Downloading TikTok, I watched vids to pass the time.

Saw one posted by a woman who was a pen pal to prison inmates.

Intrigued, I checked out the pen-pal website.

Scrolled through the prisoner profiles.

One pic stopped me in my tracks.

Cage Chapparo, then 23.

So handsome.

In his bio, he described spending summers on the beach in Los Angeles.

Just like my childhood in Valencia, Spain.

I read that he'd been convicted of aggravated robbery, aged 17, in 2014.

Jailed for 50 years.

Shocked at the harsh sentence, I wanted to find out more.

So I signed up to the site, typed a message to Cage.

Told him about myself and attached pics.

I didn't think he'd reply.

But weeks later, a letter arrived for me.

Hi Andreea, thanks for getting in touch.

Cage was so interesting and positive, telling me about his family in Texas.

And how he filled the hours in prison studying theology.

I gave him my number, told him to call me when he could.

Hearing his deep, sexy, Texan voice days later, my tummy flipped.

'I love your accent,' I giggled.

'Yours too,' he drawled.

The conversation flowed.

Then after 30 minutes the phone cut off.

That's all he was allowed.

But Cage called again the next day.

And the next.

Soon, we were talking non-stop, messaging via the site too.

Getting to know each other.

'I'm a different man from when I got arrested and sent to prison,' he confided.

I could tell that he was genuine.

He had so many regrets.

But he was paying his dues.

I just felt sad that he might not be released for another 44 years.

Such a waste of a life.

There was a spark between us.

We were playful, flirty.

Started calling each other 'girlfriend' and 'boyfriend'.

By September 2020, we were in love.

'We're soulmates,' Cage said.

'Meant to be,' I sighed.

Only, my family was worried about me.

'This isn't a real relationship,' Mum tutted.

But I knew how we felt.

And Cage's family were thrilled for us.

I'd speak to his mum and brothers on the phone.

Felt like part of the family.

In October 2020, we made a huge decision.

'Let's get married,' Cage wrote in a romantic letter.

I didn't think twice, didn't care about his jail sentence.

Or the fact I'd never met him in person.

'Yes, I want to be your wife,' I told him, vowing to visit him soon.

But Covid-19 travel restrictions slowed everything down.

Months – and years – drifted by, with us still talking every day.

We were able to 'video visit' – use secure video calls, which the prison allowed – and I loved seeing his gorgeous face.

Finally, in April 2023, I boarded a plane to Texas.

After a 5,000 mile journey, I arrived and went straight to Telford Unit prison to see Cage.

I'd never been inside a prison before.

Excitement bubbled through me, knowing I'd soon meet my soulmate.

Hearing his deep, sexy, Texan voice my tummy flipped

After security, where officers patted me down and checked my bag, I hurried to the visiting room.

Finally laid eyes on my love.

Sitting there, in a booth, behind a bullet-proof screen.

We couldn't touch one another but we pressed ourselves against the glass.

Kissed it as though we were smooching each other.

Didn't care about looks from other prisoners.

'You're more gorgeous in the flesh,' I breathed through the screen.

'You too,' he murmured.

We were mesmerised with one another.

Our allotted two hours passed too fast.

But I returned the next day.

Leaving to fly back to the UK later that week was so hard.

'I'll be back soon,' I wept, as we held our hands up to the screen.

For the next few months, I flew back and forth from London to Texas.

Used my savings to fund the flights.

Each visit was behind a screen until June 2023, when we were allowed a contact visit.

No glass partition!

Walking into the room in my yellow minidress, I saw Cage waiting.

Jumping into his strong arms, I breathed in his manly smell.

WORDS: KATE GRAHAM, LOUISE BATY

love

for him as long as it takes

Sparks flew on our first contact visit

Felt his stubble brush my cheek.

It was like the prison guards and other inmates faded away as Cage pulled me in for our first kiss.

Bliss.

'I can't believe I'm touching you,' he said, stroking my face.

I kissed his hand, didn't want to let go.

Our chemistry was off the scale.

But the guards were keeping a watchful eye.

We vowed to push forward with wedding plans.

But there were so many forms to fill in.

More red tape.

And my parents asked me to reconsider.

'I'm worried about you,' Mum told me in March 2023. 'Don't you want a family one day?'

I understood her worries but I was sure.

'I only want to be with Cage,' I insisted.

And in April 2024, I travelled back to the prison in Texas in a white dress and heels.

Cage was waiting in the prison chapel, dressed in a white linen suit.

It was just the two of us as we exchanged our vows but it felt so magical.

We cried happy tears.

Sharing a kiss afterwards, I fantasised about a different reality.

Where me and my gorgeous groom could head off straight to the honeymoon suite.

Spend all night tangled up in the bed sheets.

But that could never happen.

While Cage was locked up, bonking was banned.

After some quick wedding photos, I had to leave.

Spent my wedding night alone in my hotel room, though we talked on the phone and exchanged messages.

For now, that's all we have.

Fantasies and dreams.

Cage will be up for parole in 13 years.

He could be released then.

But if he serves his full sentence, we'll be nearly 70 by the time we share a bed.

I pray that won't happen.

And I cope with our non-existent sex life by focusing on our emotional connection.

But one thing's certain.

When my gorgeous prisoner is finally uncaged, we'll be heading straight to the bedroom.

Prison Brides is available on catch-up on Sky and Virgin Media and on the Crime+Investigation Play streaming app.

Alone on our wedding day

MAGICAL METALLICS

DRESSES

£35.99, sizes 6-18, New Look

£24, sizes 6-28, George at Asda

STYLE TIP

Go all out in head-to-toe shimmer. Look for waist-defining belts and clever ruching for a flattering finish.

£21.99, sizes xs-xxl, H&M

£39, sizes 6-28, Bonprix at freemans.com

TOPS

£32, sizes 8-20, Very

£22, sizes 10-28, Bonmarché

STYLE TIP

Perfect for dressing up your jeans, an eye-catching top needs minimal styling. Opt for long sleeves for added warmth.

£30, sizes 16-32, Evans

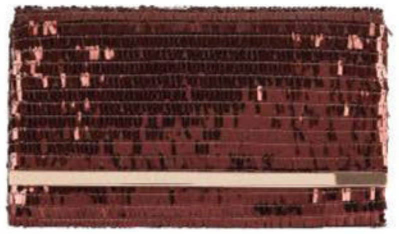
£25, sizes 6-24, M&S

ACCESSORIES

Bag, £8, Matalan

STYLE TIP

Elevate a simple look with a jazzy accessory. From party clutches to dancing shoes, they inject instant joy.


Bag, £24, Next

Shoes, £14, Primark

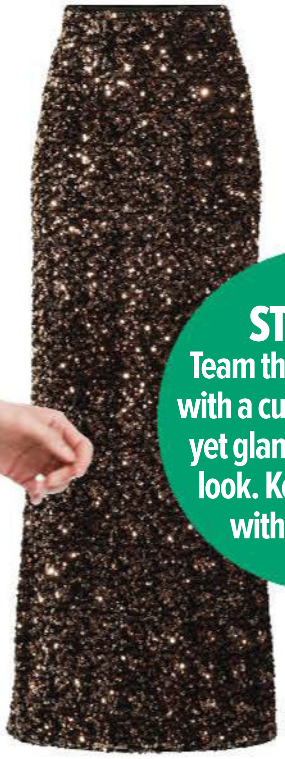
Shoes, £17, Tu Clothing

FROM £8

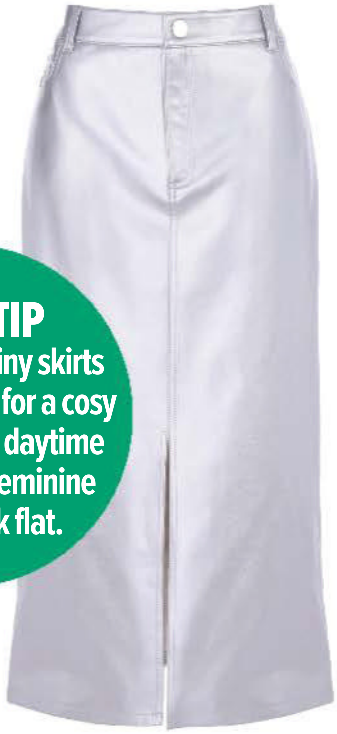
Dress, £26, sizes 10-28, **earrings,** £3.50, both Bonmarché; **shoes,** stylist's own

SKIRTS

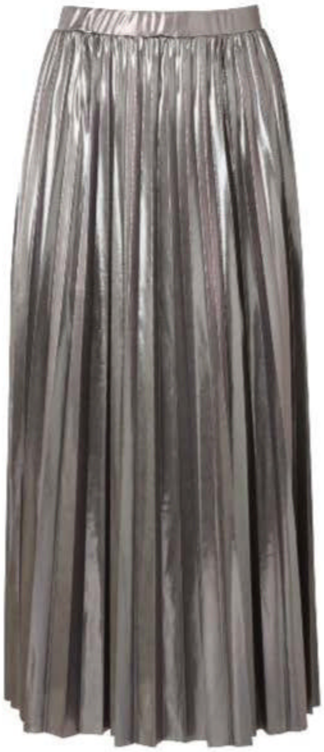
STYLE TIP
Team these shiny skirts with a cute knit for a cosy yet glamorous daytime look. Keep it feminine with a sleek flat.



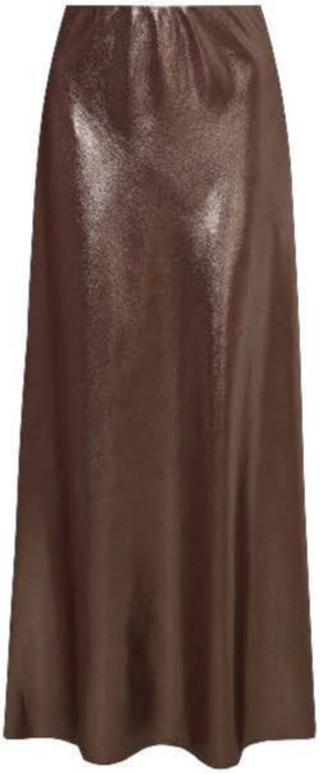
£35, sizes 8-20, Very



£22, sizes 8-24, Peacocks



£35, sizes 8-22, Love & Roses at Next



£24, sizes 8-22, George at Asda

COMPILED BY: CHARLIE BELL

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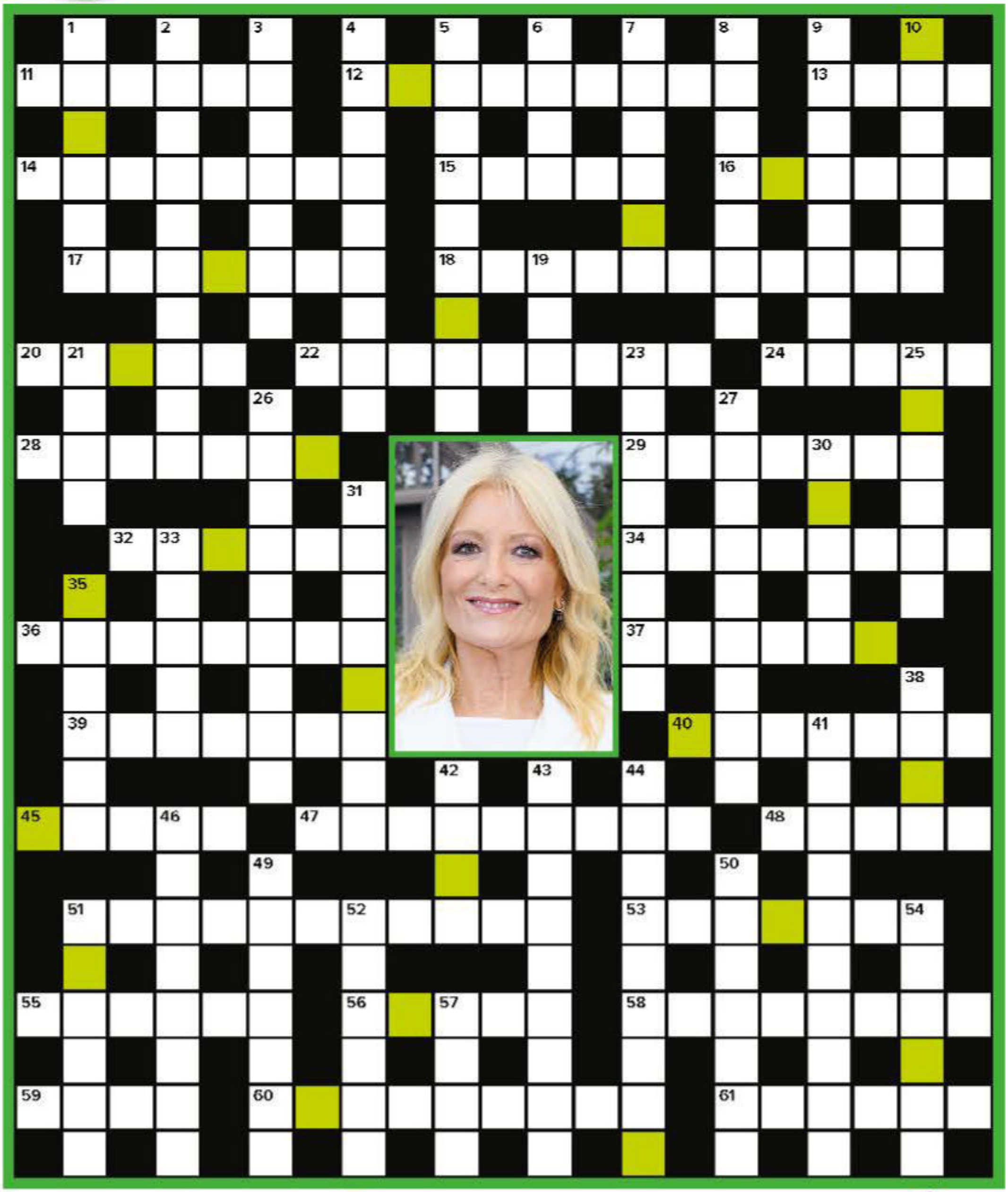
Win! £1,001 cash!

WIN £1,001 Puzzle 4

THE BIGGIE

Presenter Gaby Roslin says that she and Robbie Williams became hysterical discussing what subject on her podcast? To find out, solve the crossword then read down the shaded squares to find the four-word prize answer.



ACROSS

- **11** Soluble base or solution of a base (6)
- **12** Cycle arena with banked curves (9)
- **13** Fishes (4)
- **14** Wizard (8)
- **15** Person skilled in ninjutsu (5)
- **16** Cutlery items (6)
- **17** Railway track log (7)
- **18** Fact of taking part in (11)
- **20** Condition (5)
- **22** Strong disgust (9)
- **24** Counterfoils (5)
- **28** Tube for breathing while under water (7)
- **29** Country (7)
- **32** One who rents (6)
- **34** Wood preservative (8)
- **36** Words or drawings sprayed on walls (8)
- **37** Having existed for a very long time (3-3)
- **39** Garment (4,3)
- **40** Walks like a duck (7)
- **45** Small rodent (5)
- **47** One skilled in telling stories (9)
- **48** Sharp or severe (5)
- **51** Theatrical show (11)
- **53** On fire (7)
- **55** Summarised (6)
- **56** Honourable (5)
- **58** American state (8)
- **59** _ Postlethwaite, actor (4)
- **60** Welfare (9)
- **61** Priest's assistant (6)

DOWN

- **1** Storeys (6)
- **2** English city (10)
- **3** Break continuity (7)
- **4** Remaining fresh and vital (9)
- **5** In abundance (9)
- **6** Norse god (4)
- **7** Type of extra in cricket (2-4)
- **8** Spotty disease (7)
- **9** Clear of trees (8)
- **10** Venus, say (6)
- **19** Immense (4)
- **21** Food fish (4)
- **23** Eye specialist (8)
- **25** Loud explosions (6)
- **26** Hit back (9)
- **27** Not specifically (2,7)
- **30** Rope-making fibre (5)
- **31** African country (8)
- **33** Tiny and fragile (5)
- **35** Small cave (6)
- **38** Camping shelter (4)
- **41** Reference book (10)
- **42** _ Collins, actors (4)
- **43** Deeply imbued with (7,2)
- **44** Early signs of dissatisfaction (9)
- **46** Mixture of wine and soda water (8)
- **49** Underhand (3-4)
- **50** Gambols (7)
- **51** Fake (6)
- **52** Mix (6)
- **54** Responsible for an offence (6)
- **57** Infant (4)

LOVE GAMES?
We've got over 500 of them!
CHATMAGBINGO.COM
GAMBLE RESPONSIBLY
Play within your limits
BeGambleAware.org
See page 26 for more

Your answer:

PHOTO: GETTY

TO ENTER Turn to page 56 for details or visit comps.lifedeathprizes.com/puzzles

Terror in the

Why were 10 people wiped out in the supermarket?

Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa in court

Checkouts beeped as shoppers lined the aisles of King Soopers supermarket in Boulder, Colorado.

Nothing out of the ordinary for a Monday afternoon in March 2021.

But at 2.30pm, as people filled their trolleys, there was carnage in the car park.

A gunman on the loose.

He'd stepped out of his car and opened fire, shot two people before entering the busy shop.

Bangs rippled around the supermarket.

Realising they were gunshots, shoppers ran for their lives.

Terrified, a mum whispered to her son to stay low, not look and move fast.

Another woman crawled on to a shelf and hid among bags of crisps.

The gunman made his way down the aisles.

'This is fun,' he jeered, firing shots again and again.

He chased those who ran, sought out people who were hiding.

Yet twice he walked past a 91-year-old man, who continued to shop, oblivious to the horror going on around him.

Local police officer and father of seven Eric Talley was one of the first officers on the scene.

As a sea of terrified shoppers ran towards him, fleeing the supermarket, he charged inside.

Straight into the line of fire.

He was instantly shot dead.

Within minutes of the first shots ringing out, 10 people had been killed.

Police surrounded the building.

In an exchange of gunfire, an officer shot the suspect in the leg.

The gunman dropped his weapon, ripped off most of his clothes and surrendered.

TV crews were outside to film him being led away, naked apart from his pants, his arms tied around his back, in handcuffs.

Community in shock

Paramedics and police swarmed the building.

Freeing those who had hidden, caring for the injured and carrying away the dead.

'I nearly got killed for getting a soda,' one shopper told reporters.

In the aftermath, the community was in a state of shock.

Tributes poured in for the victims, aged from 20 to 65 years old.

Who was behind this unthinkable rampage, and why?

In September 2024, Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa, 25, appeared at Boulder County District Court, charged with 55 offences, including 10 counts of first-degree murder.

But although he admitted firing the trigger that day, he pleaded not guilty on the

aisle

Police leading shoppers out of the store

KING Soopers
STOP
POLICE
POLICE
911 POLICE

YOU'RE THE JUDGE!

Scene of the carnage

basis of being legally insane.

Just days after the massacre, Alissa had been diagnosed with a severe case of schizophrenia.

Said he'd heard 'killing voices' yelling in his head right before he opened fire.

The defence argued his actions were not his choice.

That he was too mentally ill to know what he was doing that day.

Photos were shown in court of Alissa as a happy toddler, and as a teenager enjoying trips to the beach.

While his mother Khadija Ahidid testified, Alissa looked down at his feet.

She told the court he'd been living at home with her, had a job working at the family restaurant.

But for the past few years, he'd been acting strangely.

Talked to himself, said the FBI was following him.

Even put tape over his laptop camera, believing his devices were being tracked.

He'd started isolating himself from the rest of the family, stopped showering and put on weight.

And his father suggested he'd been possessed by an evil spirit.

Right from wrong

On the morning of 22 March 2021, Alissa had come to breakfast looking 'homeless'.

Khadija had offered him money, told him to get a haircut or a shave.

Just hours later, he'd started his supermarket killing spree.

'He is sick,' Khadija said of her son.

But prosecutors insisted Alissa was sane.

Forensic psychologists acknowledged that he was mentally ill, but said he knew what he was doing when he launched his attack.

They argued that he understood the difference between right and wrong.

Prosecution lawyers said he'd acted with intention.

Spent weeks planning.

They told the court Alissa had researched online about the best public places to carry out a deadly shooting.

Considered bars and restaurants, before settling on stores.

Days before the attack, he'd had a large package delivered to the house, which contained the weapon – a Ruger semi-automatic pistol.

And on the day of the shooting, he was armed with multiple rounds of ammunition to make the attack as deadly as possible.

'Methodical and brutal'

The prosecution also argued that he didn't just fire his gun randomly.

Instead, he deliberately pursued those who were running and hiding from him – making life or death decisions.

'He is methodical and he is brutal,' said district attorney Michael Dougherty.

'This was not about mental illness. This was about brutal, intentional violence,' he added.

Defence lawyer Kathryn Herold insisted otherwise.

'This tragedy was born out of disease, not choice,' she said.

While there was no denying Alissa had shot and killed 10 innocent people, was he a cold, calculated killer? Or had he lost his mind?

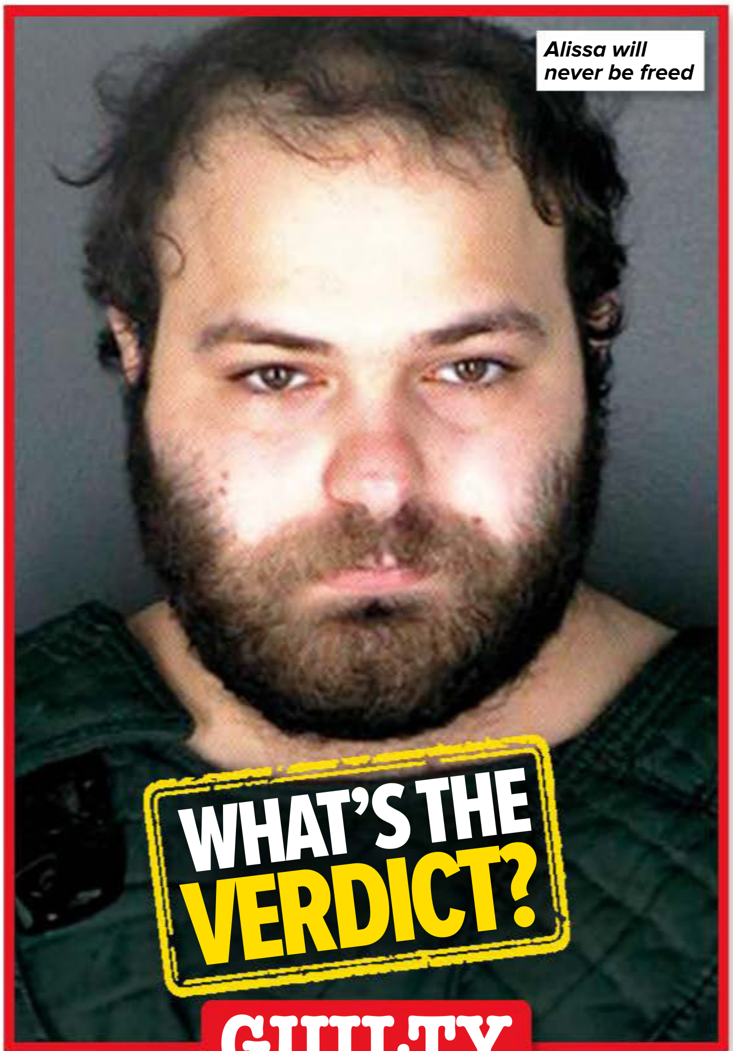
The jury would decide…

Guilty or not? Turn to find out

WORDS: FRANCES LEATE. PHOTOS: ALAMY, GETTY

A tribute to the victims

Police officer Eric Talley was the last to die



Alissa will never be freed

WHAT'S THE VERDICT?

GUILTY

The jury decided that Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa, then 25, was legally sane at the time of the attack, and in September 2024, he was found guilty of 10 counts of first-degree murder.

He was also found guilty of 38 charges of attempted murder, one count of assault and six counts of possessing illegal, large-capacity gun magazines, enabling him to store and feed ammunition into his firearm at an alarming speed.

Following the verdict, members of the victims' families spoke in court.

Star Bartkowiak lost her 49-year-old daughter Tralona in the massacre.

'We will never see her again. Never hug her. Never laugh with her, never nothing. There are no words for the loss of a child or any loved one in this manner,' she said.

Alissa was sentenced to 10 life sentences, plus another 1,334 years in prison.

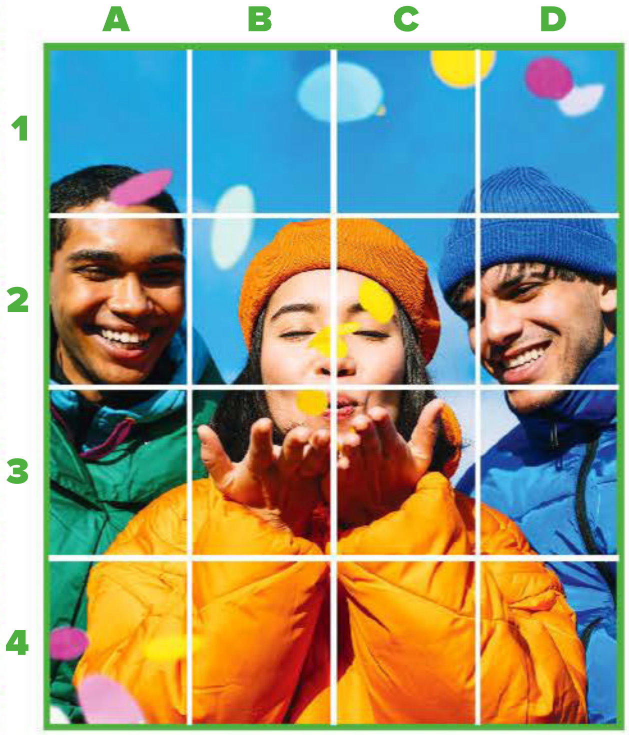
Afterwards, in a statement, Colorado governor Jared Polis said, 'That day loved ones, friends and neighbours were taken from us far too soon by an act of pure evil. Today, justice is served.

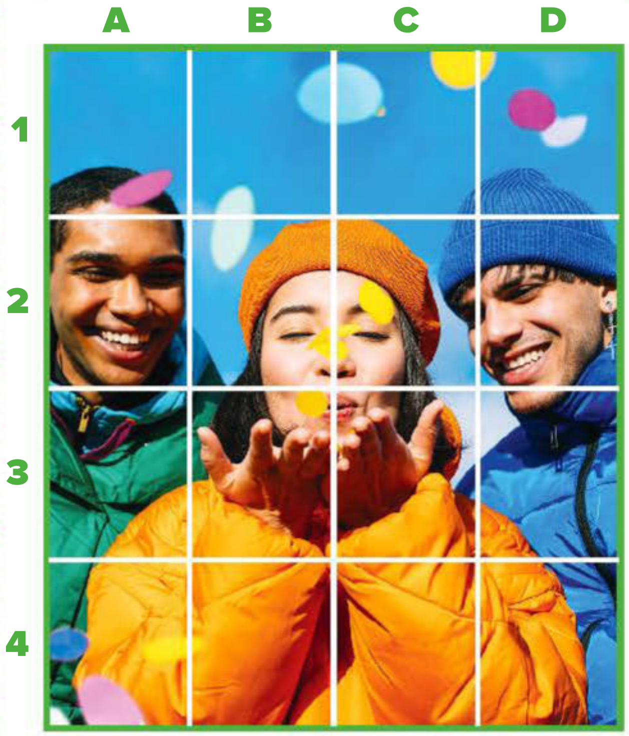
'Though I know this guilty verdict won't heal the pain so many of us feel, or bring back those who were killed, I hope that it can provide some peace.'

PHOTO: GETTY

Win! Cash!

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE





WIN 10x £20 Puzzle 5

Look closely at these two pics – there's a difference in five squares. The five grid references (eg, 1A, 2B, 2C, 3C, 4D) are your prize answer.

Your answer:

PHOTO: GETTY

TO ENTER Turn to page 56 for details

Fighting back

I'm determined to enjoy life as best I can

Kezia Kecibas, 43, Leicester

True-life PATIENT CASEBOOK

Gruelling therapy was worth it

Walking down the street with my son in his pushchair, I stumbled.

What's happening to me? I thought, steadying myself.

For the past few weeks, I'd been tripping up and losing my balance.

Doctors couldn't work out what was wrong until they sent me for an MRI.

'Have you heard of multiple sclerosis?' the doctor asked.

I nodded, feeling my stomach drop.

My friend's mum had MS.

She'd had to move into a bungalow and start using a wheelchair.

Is that going to happen to me? I wondered, terrified.

I was only 25, had a 2-year-old son. How would I cope?

The doctors started me on injections, then switched to monthly infusions when the injections stopped working.

Eventually I needed two poles to walk.

By then I'd had my daughter.

Hated that I couldn't do fun, active things with her and her brother.

Then, 10 years after my diagnosis, my specialist had bad news.

'I'm sorry, there's nothing else the NHS can do for you,' he said. I'd exhausted all treatment options.

But I couldn't give up.

I had my kids to think of.

And I loved running my holistic therapy business, Kelebek Holistic Therapies.

I wasn't ready for a wheelchair yet.

The treatment has stopped my MS in its tracks

Through an MS charity called AIMS, I learnt about haematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT).

It aims to reset the immune system by wiping it out with chemotherapy and regrowing it, using your stem cells.

It has many potential, serious side effects.

But it felt like my last hope.

My MS was too advanced for HSCT on the NHS.

And private care in the UK cost around £70,000.

But I read online that HSCT standards in Russia were high, and it was much cheaper there – £38,000.

'That's where I'm going,' I told my family.

I set up a JustGiving page and within seven months I'd raised the money I needed.

So, in July 2019, I kissed my kids goodbye and flew to Moscow.

The treatment was gruelling. After inserting a PICC line into my neck, they collected my stem cells, which took six hours.

Then came the intense chemo, which lasted five days and made my hair fall out.

Finally, they returned my stem cells to my blood.

I spent the next month in isolation while my immune system rebuilt.

I missed my kids terribly.

Was so relieved when I flew back home to Leicester.

My immune system was still fragile, so I had to shield and take things slowly.

I started physio, learning to walk again using a frame.

Within weeks, I could tie my shoelaces and open food packets – things I hadn't been able to do for years.

My left leg, which I couldn't bend before, started moving again. It felt like a miracle.

Now, I still use a walking stick to get about, but I'm so much stronger than before.

I'm incredibly grateful to everyone who donated for my treatment. HSCT has stopped my MS in its tracks.

There's no guarantee it will last forever. But for now I'm enjoying my life, one positive step at a time.

Having my stem cells harvested

I lost my hair during chemo

Find out more

Rose-tinted: M.y S.tory by Kezia Kecibas is available to buy now on amazon.co.uk.

Turn over for more health

WORDS: ELAINE HAYWARD

ASK Dr Dallas

Dr Elise Dallas is a GP whose expertise you can trust

Work after a stroke

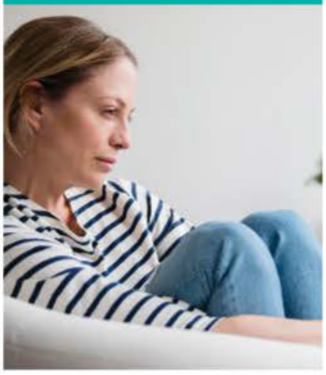
Q After a mini stroke left me with slurred speech, temporary hand numbness and dizziness, I've now made a full recovery. Is it safe for me to go back to my job?
Carla, Preston

A A mini-stroke (TIA or transient ischaemic attack) is a temporary disruption in the blood supply to the brain.

It's important to know that if you've had one mini-stroke your risk of having another or even a full stroke is higher unless you manage certain factors such as blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar and stress.

Your doctors will work quickly to reduce these risks. They might also prescribe medication to help prevent clots.

Make sure you talk to your doctor about any concerns you have. With the right care, you should be able to return to work.



Is it the male menopause?

Q I'm a 54-year-old man. I've lost some body hair and while I can get an erection, I sometimes use Viagra, and even then it's not as firm and goes soft right after ejaculation. What could be causing the problem?
Joe, Salisbury

A Some men do have hormone changes as they age, which is sometimes called andropause or the 'male menopause', and a drop in testosterone might cause issues with erections and hair loss. Even if your testosterone levels seem normal, other things like stress could be affecting how you feel.

It's a good idea to talk to your doctor about your symptoms. They can check your hormone levels and help find ways to improve your health.

Scaly skin

Q I've had the skin condition seborrheic psoriasis on my scalp, eyebrows, nose and forehead for years. My treatments are no longer working. Are there any new remedies out there?
Mary, Boston

A Seborrheic psoriasis is a long-lasting skin problem that can be tough to treat, especially when old treatments stop working.

It appears as thick, red patches and can be made worse by stress, hormones or changes in the weather.

There are new treatments you can try, like creams with steroids, calcineurin inhibitors (a type of drug used to treat various conditions including eczema and autoimmune disorders) or vitamin D to help reduce swelling. Special shampoos with tar or salicylic acid (which softens and loosens dry and scaly skin) can also help.

Taking care of your skin, moisturising regularly and managing stress may also reduce symptoms. If it's really bad, doctors might suggest stronger medicines.

New treatments are being studied and trialled, so it's important to talk to a skin doctor (dermatologist) for advice and to find out what could work for you.

WANT DR DALLAS' ADVICE? WRITE TO CHAT_MAGAZINE@FUTURENET.COM. SORRY, SHE CAN'T REPLY PERSONALLY

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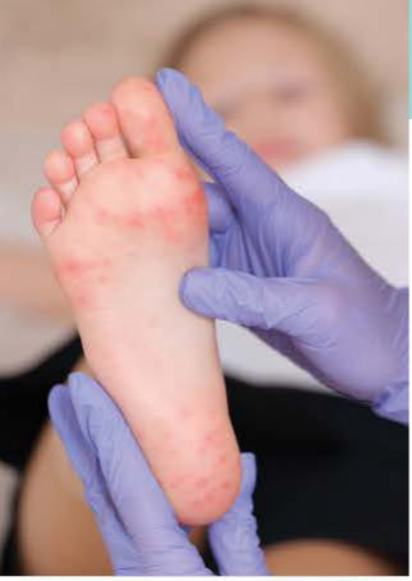


Help! My kids are spotty

Q My children have spots on their hands and feet and are unwell. Is it serious?
Shelly, Tenby

A Your children could have hand, foot and mouth disease. This is common in kids and usually causes spots or sores on the hands, feet and inside the mouth. They might also have a fever and feel tired.

While it sounds serious, it's usually not and most kids get better in about a week. But it's a good idea to keep them home from school or daycare to avoid spreading it to other children. Make sure they drink plenty of fluids and rest.

If their symptoms get worse or if they have trouble swallowing, you should talk to a doctor.

FOCUS ON…

Better sleep

Snuggle up for a restful slumber this chilly season

1 Get outside early

Exposure to morning daylight helps reset our body's inner sleep clock. 'Ideally, you should aim to get a minimum of 10 minutes of natural daylight within half an hour of sunrise,' says neuroscientist Dr Rachel Taylor*. 'Wrap up warm and have your morning cup of coffee on the doorstep.'

2 Keep cool

Are your radiators blasting at night? It might be hindering your slumber. 'Sleep follows your core body temperature cycle and it goes up until about 10.30pm, then it drops,' says Dr Michael Breus, aka The Sleep Doctor.

'The drop is a signal to release the sleep hormone melatonin, so you need the drop to make sleep happen. If it's too hot, no drop, no sleep.'

Naturally too toasty at night? Wear loose-fitting pyjamas and choose bedding made from natural fibres, such as wool or cotton.

3 Ditch devices

Blue light from screens, such as your smartphone and TV, last thing at night can make it difficult to sleep. If you need to adapt your screen habits, take it slowly. 'Start by knocking off 10 minutes, then a few days later try another 10 and so on. Gradual changes will be more sustainable,' says Dr Taylor.

4 Rub your ear

It might sound too good to be true, but rubbing the spot behind your ear where there's an obvious hollow – where your neck muscles connect with your jaw line – may help you drift off faster.

It's one of the most relaxing points in the body, according to the British Acupuncture Council.

Activating pressure points initiates your natural relaxation response.

5 Stay active

Just 10 minutes of aerobic exercise, such as walking or cycling, can dramatically improve the quality of your sleep, according to the National Sleep Foundation.

But never work out too close to bedtime. 'The adrenaline and cortisol put the body in flight-or-fight mode, which affects our ability to sleep,' says sleep expert James Wilson, aka The Sleep Geek. 'Leave around three hours between exercise and bedtime.'

6 Tidy up

'Your bedroom should be the room that you sleep in – and that really is all,' says Dr Taylor. 'Anything else that gets in the way – such as mess or piles of ironing – will only end up interfering with your sleep cycle, so have a declutter.'

PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY. *DRRACHELTAYLOR.SUBSTACK.COM. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP OR MEDICAL EXPERT BEFORE TAKING NEW SUPPLEMENTS OR MEDICATION

Win! £450 cash!

OVER TO YOU

Can you set a puzzle in this format? Send it, with a photo of yourself, to the address on p5. There's **£20** for every one we use!

This week's puzzle was compiled by ***Jay Arrowsmith, Caistor, Lincolnshire***

WIN 5 x £20 Puzzle 6

1 🟩	2	3	4
2			🟩
3	🟩		
4			🟩

ACROSS
1 At that time
2 Do something again
3 The coloured part of an eye
4 Speck of dust

DOWN
1 Have a haircut
2 A person who is admired
3 Make a change or correction
4 Something you use to smell with

Your answer:

CHAIN WORDS

What word connects a cultural group from early Bronze Age Europe and a TV character played by actor Dani Harmer? Get from Start to Finish, making words by joining two boxes together as you go, eg: COO + LING, LING +... you decide! When you reach Finish, two unused boxes join together to give you the prize answer.

WIN 3 x £50 Puzzle 7

Start COO	LING	ER
KER	DEN	RED
BEA	IM	PORT
CE	ON	RAY
DE	EM	PTY Finish

Your answer:

IN THE GRID

Which presenter and former *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!* contestant was singer George Michael's godson? Hidden in this grid, reading forwards, backwards, up, down or diagonally, are 10 items beginning with R, one for each of the subjects given below. Find them all and the remaining letters will spell out the two-word prize answer.

R	Y	M	H	T	Y	H	R
E	R	K	O	N	M	R	E
T	A	R	S	A	N	E	L
R	E	I	N	I	K	L	F
O	U	P	I	D	R	E	F
P	G	P	U	A	E	N	A
E	O	L	R	R	M	T	R
R	R	E	L	F	I	R	P

Shining
Lottery
Back down
Journalist
Pattern
Gun
Small wave
Dangerous
Scoundrel
Decay

WIN 3 x £50 Puzzle 8

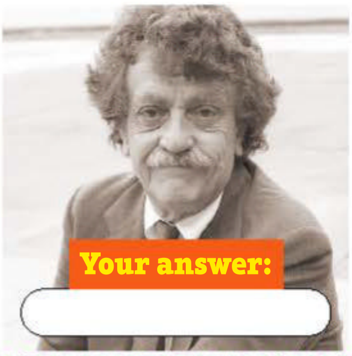
Your answer:

SKINNY ONE

WIN 2 x £25 Puzzle 9

Renowned pacifist author Kurt Vonnegut was awarded what military honour for his service in World War Two, which he jokingly suggested he received 'for frost-bite'? To find out, solve the puzzle... Add a letter anywhere in each of the boxed-off words to fit the clue, eg, Uses a tent = CAMS + P = CAMPS. Write the added letter in the space provided. Read down the added letters to spell out the prize answer.

CAMS	☐	Uses a tent
DOSE	☐	Soak
FOGS	☐	Small amphibians
HUMS	☐	Rounded hillocks
FEES	☐	Runs away
ALLY	☐	Narrow lane
CASE	☐	Pursue
WILD	☐	Brandish
BLOT	☐	Swell
PICK	☐	Pierce
TILE	☐	Name



Your answer:

PHOTOS: GETTY

TO ENTER Turn to page 56 for details or visit comps.lifedeathprizes.com/puzzles

Uber scary!

Incy wincy left me feeling like a right muppet

Zoe Rebecca, 28, Newcastle upon Tyne

Even touching a 'cuddly' spider gives me the ick!

My head sank into my fluffy pillow as I cuddled up to my teddy.

'Night, Mum,' I said, as she pulled my bedroom door shut.

But moments later, something caught my eye.

Eight long black legs scuttling towards me across my bed sheets.

'Mum!' I yelled, bolting for the door. 'There's a spider!'

Just 7 years old, I was already terrified of them.

Growing up in a draughty old council house, they were everywhere.

My mum, Lesley, then 42, kept the place spotless, but every night, we'd shake out our duvets before bed.

Horrendous.

As I got older, my fear got worse.

I became a nurse and mum of two boys, born in 2013 and 2021.

Could handle anything squeamish, like blood – easy.

But spiders made me physically retch.

While my boys loved playing outside, I refused to go anywhere near long grass.

Camping? No chance.

When I split with the boys' dad in 2023, I had no one to save me from my eight-legged enemies.

Luckily, my neighbour Neil became my spider-catching hero.

He got used to texts pleading for him to rescue me.

But in May 2024, I was home alone when I spotted a huge spider climbing the wall as I came down the stairs.

Panic rose in my chest.

Neil wasn't home, my family were all busy.

Who could I call?

Grabbing my phone, I opened the Uber app.

Booked a taxi to the local supermarket.

The app said Mohammed would be here in five minutes.

When he pulled up, I rushed out.

'Look, I don't need a lift to Morrisons,' I said. 'I just need you to come inside and get rid of a spider for me.'

'Are you serious?' he asked.

'Yes!' I said, desperate.

He gave me a funny look but parked and followed me in.

I turned to the web, posting in a local Facebook group

I hovered in the living room, peeking around the corner as Mohammed got the job done.

Afterwards, he offered to cancel the ride so I wouldn't have to pay the £4.96 fare, but I insisted.

Even gave him a £5 tip.

Worth every penny.

Then, in October, it happened again.

On the upstairs landing, I came face to face with the biggest spider I'd ever seen.

Aragog from Harry Potter.

I called everyone, but no one was free.

So I turned to the web, posting in a local Facebook group.

Can someone come remove a giant spider from my house? Will trade for a bottle of wine!

Comments flooded in.

Mostly jokes, but one woman offered to help.

Only, she arrived too late.

The spider scuttled off into the bathroom.

'Oh my God, where's he gone?!' I gasped.

For days, I lived in fear.

Imagined his many eyes looking at me every minute of the day.

I even used Neil's shower because I was too scared to use my own!

Then, as I was FaceTiming my mum, the giant spider casually strolled across the living room floor.

Bold as brass!

'He's back!' I screamed, jumping onto the sofa.

I texted Neil, who rushed over from the pub and found the spider.

What a hero!

Someone suggested I try hypnotherapy to cure my phobia, but that involves touching a spider, so it's not happening.

Although it makes me feel a bit silly, I'll stick to Ubers and legendary neighbours, thank you very much!

What's your phobia?

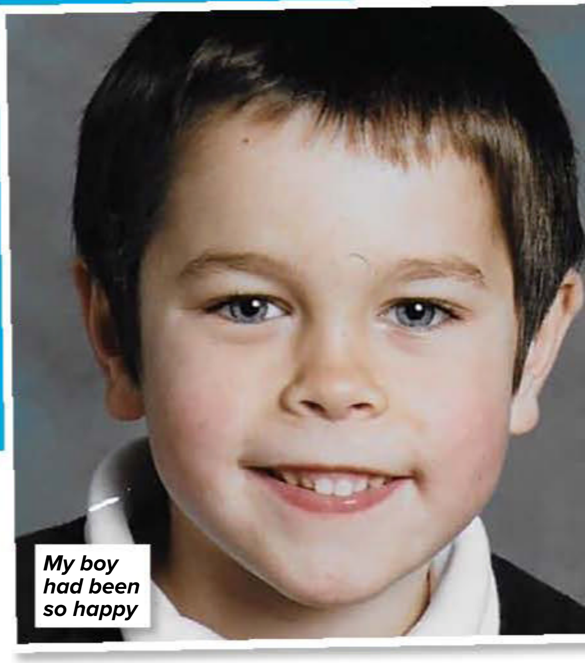
Have you a strange fear? We want to hear about it! Write in and tell us at the usual address.

WORDS: ELAINE HAYWARD, ALETHEA FARLINE. PHOTOS: NORTH NEWS & PICTURES LTD

What friends are for

When I thought no one understood my pain, I met a woman who did

Natalie Hawkridge, 62, Derby



My boy had been so happy

Bursting with excitement, my son Sam, then 8, stared up at the giant red model rocket on Blackpool seafront.

'I love it,' he beamed.

It was October 2004 and me, my husband Michael, then 48, and our sons Sam and Phillip, 5, were on holiday in Blackpool.

Sam had autism, meant he liked routine.

But he was having the time of his life.

Fairground rides, the illuminations, arcades.

Every night, Sam insisted we took the long way back to the hotel – to walk past the *Thunderbirds* model by the beach.

Sam loved *Thunderbirds*, was obsessed with trains and numbers too.

He'd count as we walked along the hotel corridor to our room, '220, 221…'

It was the way he was, one of his many quirks.

That night, we went home.

And next morning, a Saturday, Sam was going with Michael to see Derby County play football.

Only, he complained of a headache.

'Don't feel good,' he said.

I was calling the doctor when he started being sick.

Knowing Sue (centre) has been such a comfort

Martin passed away aged 16

Then he passed out, lying motionless on the floor.

'Sam!' I cried.

I phoned an ambulance and Michael quickly dropped off Phillip with a neighbour.

And as Sam was blue lighted to Royal Derby Hospital, me and Michael followed behind.

When we arrived, he was having a seizure.

'Please help my son,' I begged doctors.

We were quickly ushered out of the room.

Then a consultant came to see us.

'Sam isn't going to recover,' he said gently.

He'd suffered a brain haemorrhage.

Caused by a malfunction in his brain that had developed in the womb.

He'd been living with it his whole life, only no one had known.

Could have happened at any time.

My little lad was brain dead.

I was inconsolable.

The day before Sam had been excitedly chatting about *Thunderbirds*.

Now he was gone.

Just like that.

If you could feel your heart breaking, then I know mine did in that moment.

Michael and I just held each other in disbelief.

Over the next hour, we called family in a daze.

People came to say their goodbyes.

A relative brought Phillip to the hospital

We decided Sam would have wanted his organs to be donated.

So a transplant coordinator came to see us, explained the process.

Finally, on Sunday morning, me and Michael were left alone with our boy.

'I love you so much,' I told him.

Nurses helped us make prints on pieces of card with his hands and feet.

Then, after kissing him goodbye, we drove home in numb silence.

Later, we got a call to say Sam's life support had been switched off.

His heart was too damaged to be donated.

Michael, Phillip, me, Sue and Nigel at the British Transplant Games 2024

But his lungs, liver, kidneys and heart valves would be.

It was only later that night, unpacking Sam's trainers from our trip, that it sank in.

He was never coming home.

My grief felt like intense physical pain.

Raw. Agonising.

The next week, we held his funeral at St Osmund's Church, Derby.

Played his favourite songs from *The Lion King*.

The following day, there was more bad news.

My mum passed away.

She'd had dementia.

I never got to tell her about Sam's death but somehow I think she knew.

'She's gone to be with him,' I told Michael.

In the weeks that followed, if it wasn't for Phillip, I wouldn't have functioned at all.

'Where's Sam?' he'd ask.

It was impossible to know what to say.

In 2005 we learnt that Sam's organs had saved five lives, including two babies.

It was a comfort.

By now, I didn't want to burden friends and family with my grief.

I wanted to talk about Sam constantly, keep his memory alive.

But I worried about making people uncomfortable.

Of course, I had Michael.

But he was struggling with his own grief.

Then a representative from the Donor Family Network came to see us.

Said there were events being held throughout the year for donors, recipients and their families.

The following summer we travelled to Birmingham for a church service to celebrate donors like Sam.

Chatting to other mums and dads made me and Michael feel less alone.

A few years later, in August 2010, me, Michael and Phillip, then 11, went to the British Transplant Games in Bath for the weekend.

'Wow,' gasped Phillip, as athletes piled into the arena.

People who'd been given hearts, lungs, kidneys and even corneas, now active and well enough to compete.

Watching adults and children running, swimming and cycling was so inspiring.

That weekend, we started chatting to Sue, then 51, and her partner Nigel, then 53.

They'd lost their 16-year-old son Martin to a brain haemorrhage too, just a year before we'd lost Sam.

'It was so sudden,' she said.

As she talked about Martin's death, I was stunned by how closely it mirrored Sam's.

'He was a perfectly healthy lad before,' she sighed.

I wanted to talk about Sam, to keep his memory alive

Martin had dreamt of becoming a nurse.

So when they were asked about donating his organs, they knew it's what he'd have wanted.

I'd felt alone in my pain as a bereaved mother.

But Sue got it.

She'd been to the same dark places.

We chatted for hours, swapped numbers.

And over the next months, and then years, we formed a strong friendship.

'I'm so proud of our boys,' I told Sue after another long chat over the phone one day.

Every year, we see each other at the British Transplant Games.

Meet up on holidays near Scarborough too.

Our friendship has lasted 14 years.

In that time, we've talked endlessly about our boys.

I feel like I knew Martin thanks to all of Sue's stories and it's been a comfort to share my own memories of Sam with her.

We often talk about what they'd be like now.

Losing a child is one of the hardest things anyone can ever go through.

But when you have someone else who understands, it's a godsend.

We've made a beautiful friendship in the worst of circumstances. Something else to thank Sam for.

Sue, 65, from Lincolnshire, says: 'Years have passed now since our boys died, and the rawness of grief does eventually fade, but we were never really at peace until we met each other. Through hours of talking, sharing our stories, we were able to accept what had happened and move on to some extent. Our friendship has proved a huge comfort to both of us.'

WORDS: FRANCES LEATE, LUCY LAING

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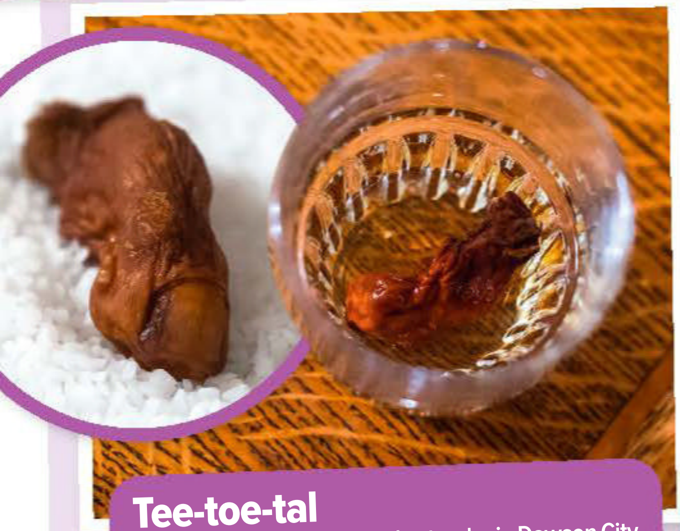
Bottoms up!

Packing in booze for Dry Jan? These weird tipples will put you right off

Sssnake bite

Snake wine is a Chinese delicacy made by infusing entire snakes in rice wine or grain alcohol. Historians reckon people first drank snake wine to reinvigorate them during the Western Zhou dynasty 3,000 years ago. Some variations also contain whole scorpions. Mmmm, yummy!



Tee-toe-tal

Legend has it that in 1973 a bartender in Dawson City, Canada, found a mummified toe in a remote log cabin, chopped off by a frost-bitten traveller. Bizarrely, he took it back to The Downtown hotel and offered drinkers a chance to join the Sourtoe Club by having the actual human toe added to their drink. The hotel has since started collecting toes. The saying goes, 'You can drink it fast, you can drink it slow, but your lips must touch the toe.' Vom.

Worm and fuzzy

Fancy a, erm, worm with that shot? The Mexican drink mezcal is famous for being bottled with a moth larva, which apparently gives the drink more flavour. You can eat the worm if you really want to, but the general advice is to swallow it whole rather than bite into it… We'll pass thanks.

Need an ant-idote?

Green ants are traditionally used by indigenous Australians to make medicine. But the Something Wild beverage company in the Adelaide Hills has added the little critters to their gin distilling process, to create ant gin, insisting that they add notes of lime and coriander.

Smells fishy

Korea's national drink – soju – is distilled rice wine, which comes in a range of flavours. In seafood restaurants called 'tuna houses', you can order a tuna tears shot. Poured from a teapot, this thick, jelly-like drink is made up of soju mixed with fluid from the eye of a tuna fish. Yes, really.

Saddle up!

Kumis – also spelt coumis or kumyz – is fermented horse milk. An ancient drink, enjoyed for over 2,000 years by Central Asian tribes. As mare's milk has an unfortunate laxative effect when drunk raw, it's nearly always fermented and drunk as a milky tipple. We'd prefer a Baileys.

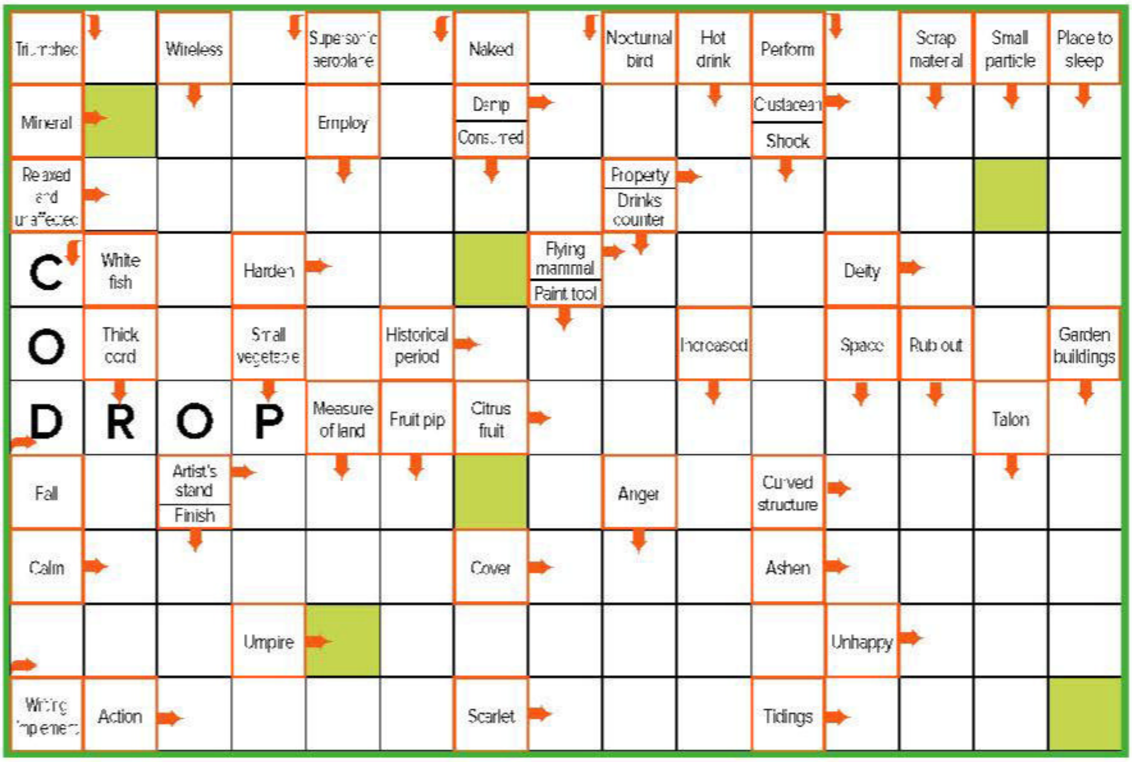
WORDS: LOUISE BATY. PHOTOS (MAIN POSED BY MODEL): ALAMY, GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK

Win! £600 cash!

ARROW WORD

WIN £500 Puzzle 10

In Zoroastrianism, which animals are considered sacred because the spirits of a thousand dogs are reborn in each one? Solve the puzzle by following the arrows and writing in your answers. Then read down the letters in the shaded squares to find the prize answer.


Truncheon
Wireless
Supersonic aeroplane
Naked
Nocturnal bird
Hot drink
Perform
Scrap material
Small particle
Place to sleep
Mineral
Employ
Damp
Consumed
Crustacean
Shock
Relaxed and unaffected
Property
Drinks counter
C
White fish
Harden
Flying mammal
Paint tool
Deity
O
Thick cord
Small vegetable
Historical period
Increased
Space
Rub out
Garden buildings
D
R
O
P
Measure of land
Fruit pip
Citrus fruit
Talon
Fall
Artist's stand
Finish
Anger
Curved structure
Calm
Cover
Ashen
Umpire
Unhappy
Writing implement
Action
Scarlet
Tidings

Your answer:

SUDOKU

To solve the puzzle, each 3 x 3 box, each row and each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9. Solve the puzzle and the numbers in the highlighted squares will give you the prize puzzle answer.

🟩	1		3			2		5
9	6	4						
	5		6		1			8
7		8	🟩	6		9		
			1		9			
		9		8		5		6
4			9		7		5	
						8	4	7
3		6			8		2	🟩

WIN 2 x £30 Puzzle 11

Your answer:

WORDSEARCH

WIN £40 Puzzle 12

Which of these precious stones was declared the state gemstone of Florida in 1970? The answer is the one missing from the grid.

E	R	E	N	I	R	T	I	C
T	Y	A	D	I	R	O	S	B
A	P	E	M	A	C	R	P	I
G	L	E	S	I	J	B	I	S
A	N	Y	T	R	R	B	N	M
P	J	I	R	I	E	A	E	U
J	A	S	P	E	R	G	L	T
E	W	W	R	U	B	Y	I	H
T	Q	U	A	R	T	Z	P	T

AGATE
BERYL
BISMUTH
CITRINE
GABBRO
JADE
JASPER
JET
LARIMAR
MOONSTONE
PYRITE
QUARTZ
RUBY
SPINEL
TIGER'S EYE

Your answer:

PHOTOS: GETTY

TO ENTER Turn to page 56 for details or visit comps.lifedeathprizes.com/puzzles

BEST MUGS

Pour yourself a cuppa in one of these stylish buys

IT'S BEEN A LOOOOOONG DAY

Sam the sausage dog, £5, Dunelm

Hand-painted stripe, £5, Habitat

Red toadstool lidded, £10, Next

Navy floral tankard, £4, Habitat

CUTE
CHARACTER

Frog-shaped, £3.50, Primark

Blue check, £3.40, Søstrene Grene

Pink cowboy boot, £5, Flying Tiger

Multicoloured letter, £5, Matalan

CUP OF
POSITIVI-TEA
BARGAIN
BUY

Positivi-tea, £2, B&M

Cockapoo Crazy

Cockapoo crazy, £4, B&M

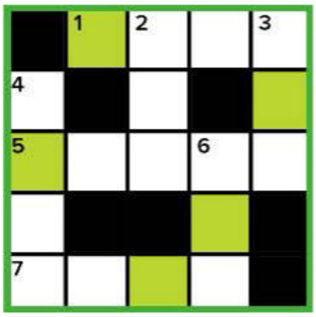
COMPILED BY: ESME CLEMO

Win!

LITTLE ONE

Tracing its history back to 1799, the institution currently known as the Peabody Essex Museum is in which US city?

Solve the crossword then read down the shaded squares to find the prize puzzle answer.



ACROSS
1 Animal with antlers (4)
5 Young sheep (5)
7 Capital of Italy (4)

DOWN
2 _ Key, comedian and poet (3)
3 Type of fossil fuel (3)
4 Britpop band (4)
6 Hive dweller (3)

WIN 4 x £20
Puzzle 13

Your answer:

TO ENTER
Turn to page 56 for details or visit comps.lifedeathprizes.com/puzzles

Face it, I'

A mystery condition changed my looks but not

Gillian Kgotla, 29, Eastbourne, East Sussex

As I got to the school doors, I put my head down and started walking faster.

My usual routine. But still the cruel insults came.

'Half face!' a girl shouted as I made my way along the corridor.

'Ugly!' a boy yelled, blocking my way into the classroom.

I took a deep breath, smiled, then calmly stepped around him.

Sat at my desk, took my books out of my bag.

As I concentrated on the teacher's words, I felt eyes on me.

The student next to me was staring at my face.

He quickly turned away.

I couldn't blame him.

Every morning, I stared at my own face in the bathroom mirror.

Scrutinising it.

It was October 2011 and I endured daily bullying – all thanks to my collapsing face.

It'd started three years earlier when, aged 13, a dark mark appeared under my left eye.

'Ringworm,' my doctor said, giving me some cream.

The patch healed but my eye became sore and itchy, the area around it losing volume.

My eye was sinking into my face.

I saw more doctors, had test after test.

But no explanation could be found.

And there were no other symptoms.

Still, it got worse, spreading to my nose, my mouth, my ear…

Now, aged 16, the whole left side of my face was falling away.

'Beauty isn't just what's in the mirror,' my mum Florence, then 45, reassured me, as I fretted over my reflection.

'It's who you are on the inside.'

So I read self-help books about building confidence and dealing with bullies.

No longer hiding, I worked on being bold

The world will receive what you put out…

If you give out low confidence and fear then that's how you'll be treated.

Changed the way I looked in the mirror.

'I am loveable. I am beautiful. I am going to change the world,' I told myself.

No longer hiding my face, I held my head high.

I worked on being bold, having presence.

I understood my face was unexpected, so I gave people time to look.

To process what they were seeing, then hopefully look at the person behind it.

After leaving school, I studied biology at university.

Wore a wig to cover the bald patches that had appeared on my left side.

Some teeth had dropped out, and I could only open my mouth 2cm on that side.

It meant I had to cut my food into small pieces.

Still, I slicked on some red lipstick and recited my daily affirmations.

'I am beautiful,' I said to my reflection.

By letting my personality shine, I made friends easily.

In 2015, I got chatting to a man online. We agreed to meet up.

'What's wrong with your face?' he asked me outright.

'I don't know,' I told him, honestly.

'You're adorable,' he said.

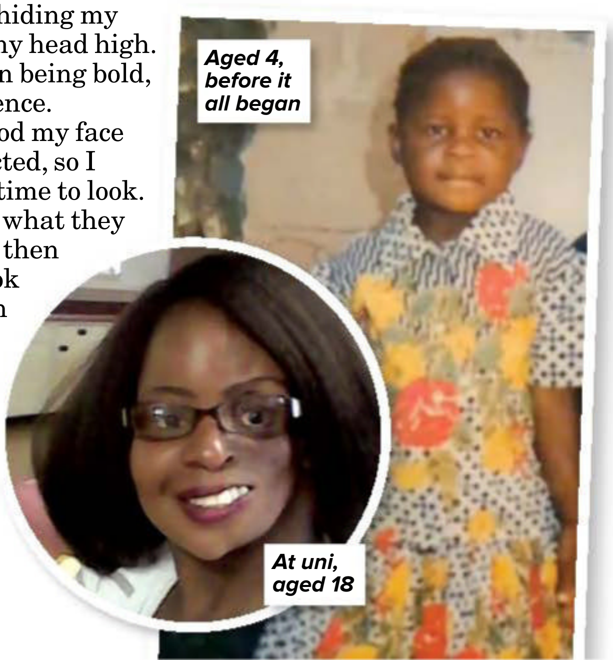
That was not the response I'd expected!

From that moment on, we were inseparable.

By 20, my face had stopped getting any worse.

But it was frustrating not to have a name for it.

Then, in June 2023, I was scrolling on social media when a video popped up.



Aged 4, before it all began

At uni, aged 18

WORDS: KERRY HARDEN, JULIA SIDWELL. PHOTOS: GEMINI STUDIOBW, TELL & SELL STORIES

’m beautiful

my spirit

A young man whose face was sunken on one side.

‘Just like me,’ I gasped.

Lukas Caldwell, from the US, was raising awareness about a condition called Parry Romberg syndrome.

I looked it up.

A progressive shrinkage and degeneration of the tissue beneath the skin, I read.

Possibly an autoimmune condition, but the cause was unknown.

I learnt fat grafts could help rebuild the face.

Went straight to my GP, who referred me to a specialist at Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead.

The first specialist I saw hadn’t heard about the syndrome but in February 2024, I met a doctor who had seen it before.

Now I’m undergoing scans and tests, which will hopefully confirm it.

Getting a diagnosis will give me a sense of closure.

But it won’t change my attitude.

Yes, my face has wasted away, but it hasn’t stopped me doing anything.

I’ve been to school, to university, I can drive, I’ve travelled the world.

I have a loving partner and a good job in finance technology.

I’m grateful for all those things.

In May 2024 I started posting motivational videos on social media, talking about my condition.

Just me, getting ready for work or the gym, cooking or going for a walk.

I talk about self-love and self-acceptance.

‘We need to love ourselves before we can expect someone else to love us,’ I tell my followers. ‘Live beyond the mirror.’

Now I get hundreds of messages every day.

People saying they feel ugly, even though their faces are perfectly symmetrical.

‘Focus on the potential that’s inside you. It has nothing to do with how you look,’ I tell them.

Of course, I’ve also had some horrible messages, people telling me I must hate myself with ‘that face’.

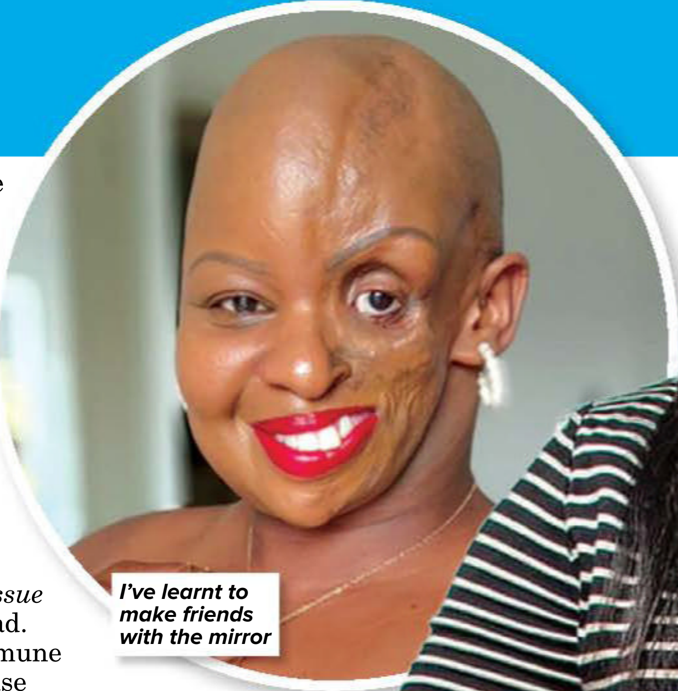
Far from it, I tell them.

I love myself. And my face.

I’ve made friends with the mirror and I hope I can help teach others to do the same.

Maybe one day I’ll have surgery to rebuild my face.

But it doesn’t matter if I don’t, because I already know I’m beautiful.



I’ve learnt to make friends with the mirror

Now I teach my followers self-love

Find Gillian on social media @gilliankgotla.

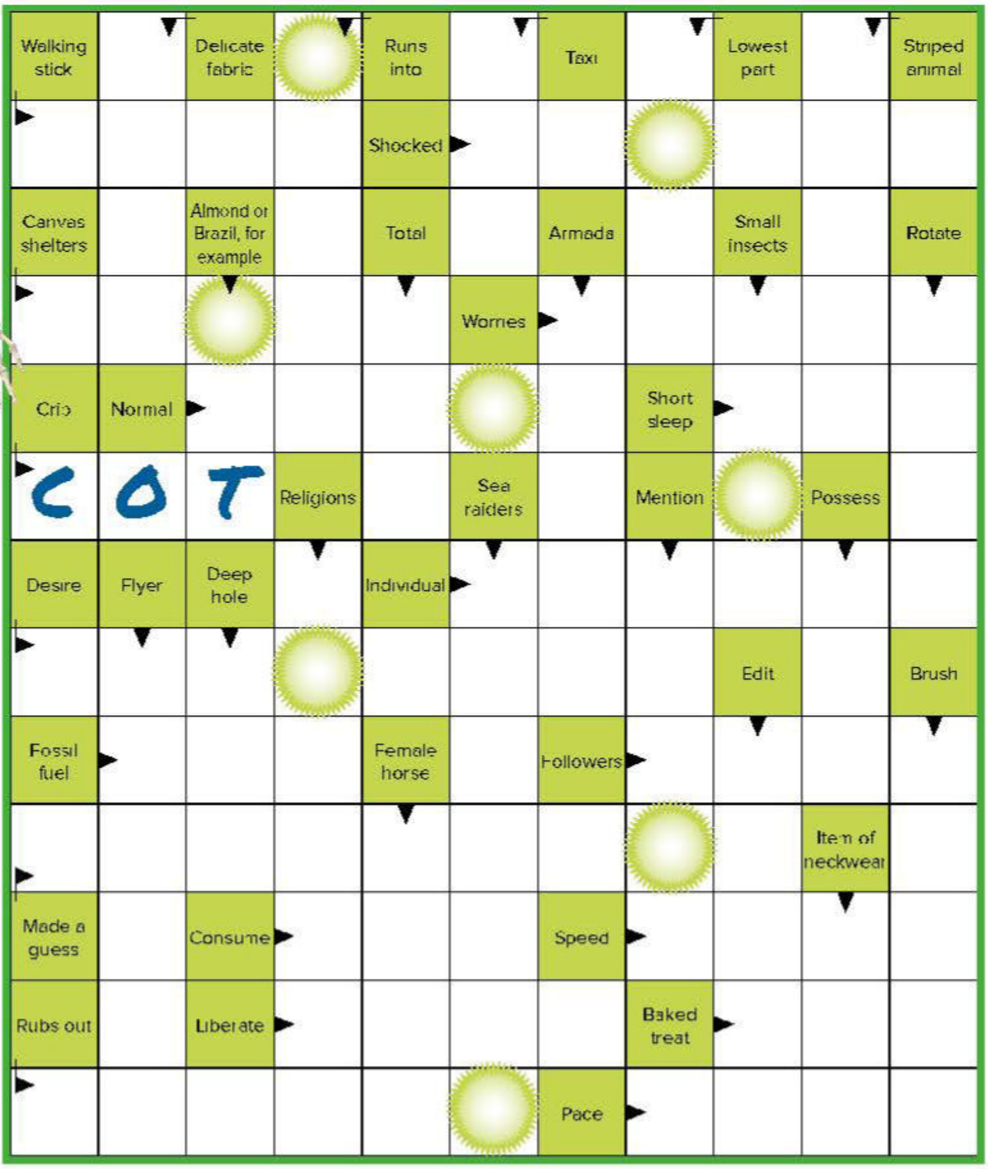
Win! £200 cash!

FILL ME IN

WIN £100 Puzzle 14

All mammals have seven vertebrae in their neck, apart from sloths and which other animals? Solve the puzzle by following the arrows and writing in your answers. Then read down the letters in the shaded squares to find the prize answer.

Your answer:


Walking stick
Delicate fabric
Runs into
Taxi
Lowest part
Striped animal
Shocked
Canvas shelters
Almond or Brazil, for example
Total
Armada
Small insects
Rotate
Worries
Crib
Normal
Short sleep
COT
Religions
Sea raiders
Mention
Possess
Desire
Flyer
Deep hole
Individual
Edit
Brush
Fossil fuel
Female horse
Followers
Item of neckwear
Made a guess
Consume
Speed
Rubs out
Liberate
Baked treat
Pace

CIRCLE TIME

Pat O'Callaghan was the first athlete representing Ireland to win an Olympic medal in which event in 1928? Fit the words into the grid, then read down the letters in the shaded circles.

3 letters
ARM
ART
GUM
HUM
HUT
MET
MUM
RUT
TUT

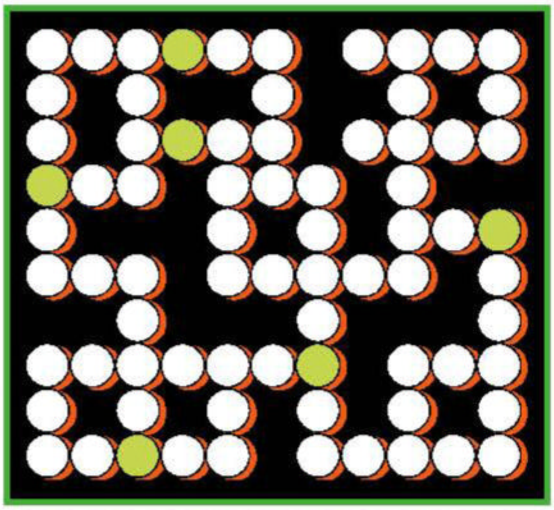
4 letters
EAST
SATE
SEEM
SMUG
SMUT
STEM

5 letters
TAROT
TIDAL
TILER
TIMER

6 letters
MURMUR
MUSHES
MUTTER
MUTUAL

7 letters
TIDIEST
TILLAGE

WIN £100 Puzzle 15



Your answer:

PHOTO: GETTY

TO ENTER Turn to page 56 for details or visit comps.lifedeathprizes.com/puzzles

ASK Aunty Nelly

Our Antonella tells it how it is

Hubby wants a boy

Q I'm feeling torn up inside. I've given my husband three beautiful daughters, but I know he always wished for a son.

I adore my girls but can't stop feeling like a failure, like I've let my hubby down.

How do I deal with this and embrace the joy of my family without feeling inadequate?

Kimi, 34

A Goodness me. You're not a failure, pet! You've given the world three amazing people, which is a treasure trove in itself.

Perhaps having girls taught him more about himself than he ever thought possible!

Do you really know that your husband dreamt of having a son or have you assumed that?

Don't drive yourself mad worrying about a problem that likely doesn't exist.

You didn't make these kids on your own – he had something to do with it too!

Will things get better?

Q Life seems so expensive at the moment and the demands of everything I constantly need to cover feel like they're crushing me.

I'm seriously struggling to make ends meet every month and it's affecting my wellbeing.

The future fills me with anxiety, and I can't shake the fear of things getting worse.

How do I find hope and strength when everything feels so uncertain?

Donna, 38

A Finances can feel like a heavy cloud. You're not alone – this is something most people worry about, love.

Take it each day at a time and live in the present.

You can't change the future if you don't work on today.

Take a good look at your spending and see if there are any costs you can trim.

Share your concerns with family and friends as it can be a great comfort to know you're in the same boat as them.

Parents vs profession

Q In my culture, girls aren't usually encouraged to pursue education, but I dream of becoming a dermatologist.

I love and respect my heritage and I don't want my family to think I'm rejecting our traditions.

How can I show them that pursuing my dream doesn't mean shunning my culture?

Lily, 19

A You can embrace your culture and live your dreams. Explain to your family that you're not denying your heritage, but you'll be doing things a little differently going forward.

Tell them exactly what a dermatologist does and share your passion for it with them.

Knowledge and education will make you stronger, love.

Ask for their support and guidance.

I'm sure they'll be proud of you, petal.

She needs a good scrub

Q I'm currently really struggling to get on-board with the lifestyle that my grown-up daughter has adopted.

She's happy and has a good job, but she just doesn't seem to care about cleaning or showering the way I do.

Her partner seems to be of the same mind and it's really been bothering me.

Should I say something?

Marie, 57

A I'm less bothered by dishes in the sink or dust on her skirting boards. Who hasn't allowed the housework to get on top of them occasionally?

But what is worrying is her lack of personal hygiene. Is this a recent thing, or has it been a while?

If she's only recently started to skip showering, that can be a sign of poor mental health.

Approach this very carefully, sweetheart. She might not realise she's not taking care of herself.

FACEBOOK.COM/ANTONELLAUNCENSORED. INSTAGRAM.COM/ANTONELLAUNCENSORED. NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED. AUNTY NELLY PHOTO: PHILIPPA GRACE PHOTOGRAPHY. PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY

Want Aunty Nelly's advice? Send your problems to chat_magazine@futurenet.com

Weigh to

In our weekly showcase from our sister site Truly, we meet 11-year-old Rowan, who makes light work of heavy lifting

With his bulging biceps and muscular physique, Rowan looks as though he's been lifting weights for years.

And he has!

Incredibly, the 11-year-old first started showing an interest in strength training when he was just a toddler.

'I ran a gym for three years,' Rowan's dad Ben explains.

'But my background is in rehab for people with more complex needs, so that's where Rowan has found the gym,' he says.

While most tots are still learning to walk at 18 months, Rowan was getting stuck in at the gym his dad used for his clients.

'We'd just find him grabbing objects, so [since] before he was 2, he's been interested in training,' Ben says.

'It sounds bonkers,' his mum Gemma acknowledges, 'but you have to realise that that was the environment he was in a lot,' she says.

But although Rowan has always been keen to lift weights, his parents made sure to wait until his tiny body was more capable.

'We didn't really bring weights in until he was a bit older, about 5 to 6 years old,' Ben says.

Rowan remembers it well.

'My first proper memory in the gym… I was hanging off a pull-up bar doing pull-ups and everyone was clapping me,' he says.

From there, Rowan started powerlifting, which consists of squats and dead lifts, and soon got into competing.

He's careful to eat a balanced diet, to help build muscle

'Rowan had asked me if he was able to compete in a novice competition in our old gym, so I asked the owner and he allowed him to at 9 years old,' Ben explains.

'I wanted Rowan to get some recognition for how good he was,' he says.

Something that Rowan has now achieved.

'I'm the world's strongest 11-year-old,' he says proudly.

'As soon as I get in from school, I'm out the door straight to training,' he adds.

'My training now is a lot harder than it was when I was younger,' he says.

'I do roughly two hours of training a day, and I train four times a week.'

And with seven world records under his belt, his hard work has paid off.

'My squat is 115kg, my dead lift is 135kg and my total is 310kg,' he explains.

'That is the heaviest total of all time for an under-12,' he beams.

While Rowan admits the feeling of getting a personal best in powerlifting is 'amazing', he realises that he needs to continue to work hard in order to keep his title.

'Now, I have to lift heavy or else I'm going to lose my strength easily,' he says.

Alongside strength training, Rowan also plays rugby twice a week, something he hopes to do professionally in the future.

And he's careful to eat a balanced diet, to help him build muscle.

'It's very important for me to eat the right food, because if I want to, let's say, hit a new world record, and if I don't eat the right food, then I'm not going to see the progress that I want to see,' Rowan says.

While some people think his parents must be the driving force behind his hobby, Rowan says otherwise.

'My parents are not pushy at all. They don't push me to go to the gym, they don't push me to eat my protein. I want to do that myself.

'I know a lot of people think that they are pushy, but they're not. I push myself to do my best, they don't push me to do anything,' he says.

His dad agrees.

'I don't think we're pushy parents,' Ben says.

Ben and Gemma want both kids to have a good start

PHOTOS: FUTURE STUDIOS

go!

Now he's a record-breaker

Even as a tot, Rowan was into training

He can't wait to get in the gym

An early powerlifting session

'I think that what we do is give Rowan an opportunity to excel in whatever he wants to excel in. If Rowan said to me tomorrow he wants to be a painter, we'd be painting every day.

'It's a very, very difficult world, and if you haven't got a work ethic and you haven't got a will to achieve then you're going to struggle in life,' says Ben.

'We have experienced some judgement,' admits Gemma, 'but I think on the whole, it's been quite positive.'

'We've had a few that have said he needs to have a proper childhood, and that really upset us because Rowan is so busy, he does loads of amazing things,' she says.

Also parents to Hettie, 3, Gemma says, 'We're very loving and we're very supportive of the children.'

Although she says Hettie is very different from her brother, and not at all into fitness like Rowan was at her age.

'I just like giving our son and our daughter the best opportunities that we can, and it's not the sort of thing you can push a child to do, they have to want to do it,' she says.

'You can't force somebody to lift heavy weights!'

And despite having such a busy training schedule, Gemma says Rowan still makes plenty of time to see his friends.

'He does do nice things, it's not all relentless!' she says.

'I just want our kids to have a really good opportunity, a good start in life,' Ben explains.

'He has strong, stable joints, he has strong bones, he's never been injured and that's testament to the lifting that we've done with him,' he adds.

All in all, the pros outweigh the cons.

'It's amazing to see him achieving all of this,' Gemma says. 'We're really, really proud of him.'

Truly is the home of Amazing True Stories – celebrating difference, maintaining a sense of wonder and confronting the extreme.
Search 'truly' at youtube.com

Win! £575 cash!

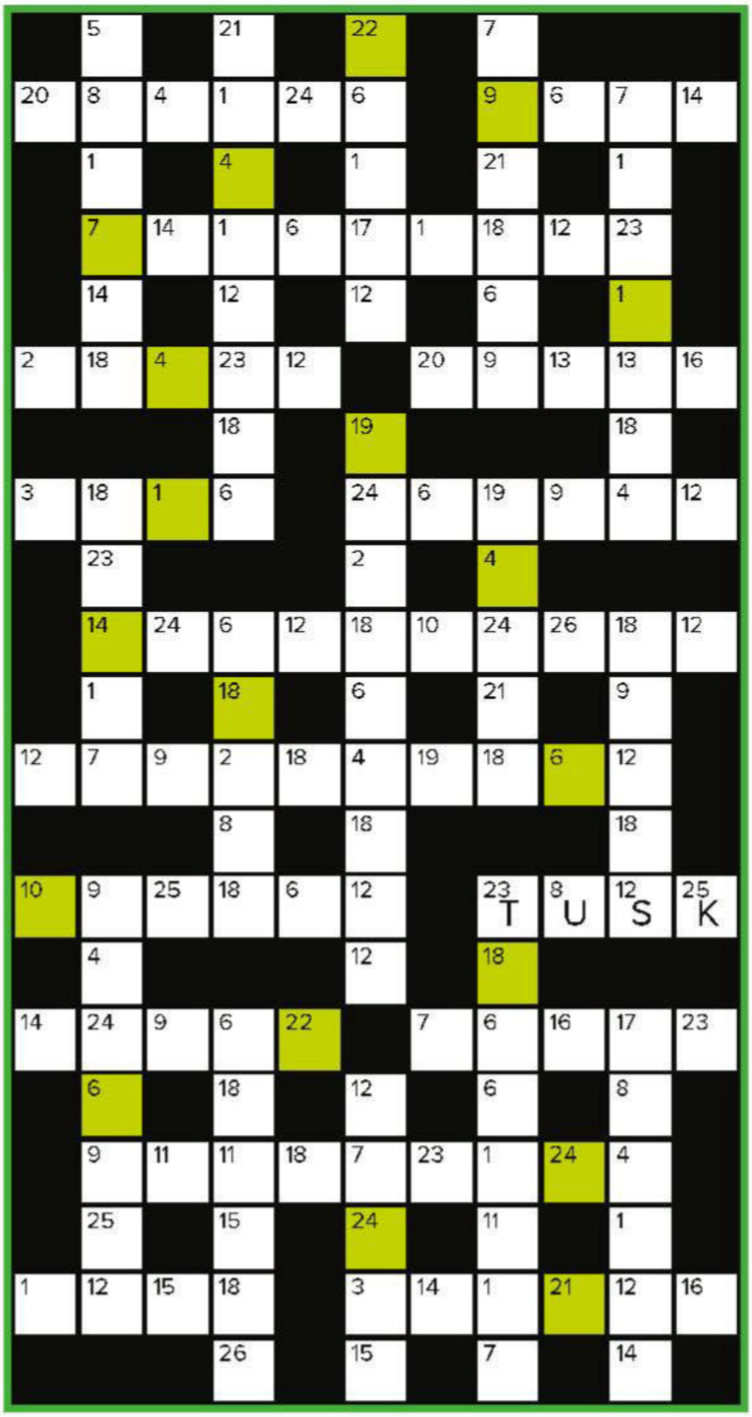
CODE CRACKER

WIN 2 x £250 Puzzle 16

What does actor and producer Elle Fanning find empowering? To find out, solve the puzzle... Fill in the grid. Each letter of the alphabet has been replaced by a number from 1 to 26. When you've completed the grid, the shaded squares will spell out the four-word prize answer. We've given you four letters to start off.

Your answer:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	~~K~~	L	M
N	O	P	Q	R	~~S~~	~~T~~	~~U~~	V	W	X	Y	Z



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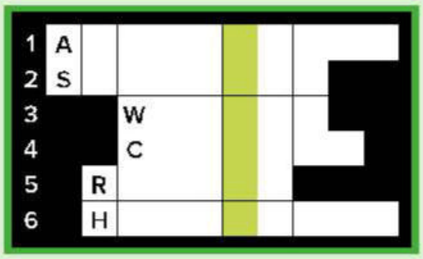
WORD JUMBLE

WIN £75 Puzzle 17

What name connects a puppet on the CBBC show *Scoop* and the role played by David Haig in a 2013 revival of a 1980s sitcom? Unscramble each group of letters to discover six words associated with the internet. Now fit them across the grid and you'll spell out the answer to the question.



1 A
2 S
3 W
4 C
5 R
6 H

1 TACT ANTHEM
2 AWE FROST
3 ABC MEW
4 SO OK ICE
5 TRUE OR
6 PLY HER INK

Your answer:

PHOTO: GETTY

TO ENTER Turn to page 56 for details or visit comps.lifedeathprizes.com/puzzles

CASH SMART

We help you make savvy choices, so your hard-earned goes that bit further

3 ways to... boost your financial resilience

Top tips to make you better able to cope with the unexpected...

1 Emergency fund

It's easier said than done, but having a pot of cash saved can help you prepare for any unexpected expenses like a car repair, but also if you lose your job or can't work due to illness. While it's generally considered that having three to six months' essential outgoings available in an instant access savings account is a good rule of thumb to give yourself a solid financial cushion, any savings are better than none. So go through your budget and calculate how much you can afford to save each month. Check where you can cut costs too, so you can save more. Find more information, including whether you should pay any debts off before saving into an emergency fund, at moneyhelper.org.uk.

2 Have a safety net

You may consider taking out protection insurance. There are different types available, each protecting against different events and offering various levels of cover. For example, income protection insurance covers some of the income you lose if you can't work because you're ill or injured until you retire or can return to work. But research carefully to ensure it's right for you and always check the small print.

3 Ask for help

If you're struggling with debt, don't delay seeking help. There are charities and organisations that offer free money and debt advice including Citizens Advice (citizensadvice.org.uk) and Step Change Debt Charity (stepchange.org).

PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY

Go green, save cash

Fed up of plastic packaging? Why not check if there's a zero waste store near you? These let you take in your own containers and fill them with food such as rice and pulses and you pay for the items you buy by weight.

SAVING OF THE WEEK

Sleeping beauty

Snap up Dr Organic Moroccan Argan Oil Night Cream (50ml), a rich hydrating, nourishing and revitalising overnight cream, for half price at Beauty Naturals. It was £12 but is now £6 until 12 January 2025. Go to beautynaturals.com/magoffer or call 0116 318 3773. Offer subject to availability. UK only. Postage £2.50, free postage on orders over £20. Offer correct at time of going to press.

dr.organic
MOROCCAN ARGAN OIL NIGHT CREAM
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Your questions answered

Q Does travel insurance cover you if you need to cancel your trip due to illness?
M. Brown, Cheshire

A Most travel insurance policies do include cancellation cover, which provides financial protection if you have to cancel because of unforeseen circumstances such as illness. But details will vary by policy and not all policies include it, so do check. And you won't be covered if you cancel because of a pre-existing medical condition you didn't declare. Find out more at comparethemarket.com.

Five little

Speaking them out loud was the start of a big journey

Sarah Clarke, 35, Leeds, West Yorkshire

WORDS: KERRY HARDEN, ANN CUSACK. PHOTOS: FOCUS FEATURES

Rolling myself out of bed, my feet hit the floor.

‘Ouch,’ I gasped, pain shooting through my legs.

Grabbing my walking stick, I shuffled to my wardrobe, pulled out a baggy shirt, some stretchy leggings.

Glancing in the mirror, my tired, bloated face looked back.

Another day of pain.

It was January 2022 and at 33, I was living in the body of an OAP.

I had fibromyalgia, sleep apnoea, chronic fatigue, shooting pain in my feet.

Plus, my doctor warned I was at risk of diabetes.

All because I was hugely overweight.

Ever since I could remember, I’d been bigger than my friends.

My appetite was insatiable.

I’d finish my tea, then my sister’s, still didn’t feel full.

Then I’d snack on crisps, chocolates, anything I could get my hands on.

When I left primary school, aged 11, I was a size 16.

Size 24 when I left secondary school at 16.

I made up for it with my big personality.

Had loads of friends, loved a night out.

I’d be the first on the dance floor, downing pints of beer, shots of vodka.

Shrugged off rude comments from drunk men.

I’d finish the night with a takeaway, the carton piled high with a greasy kebab and chips.

I hit the gym, determined to be healthier

I knew I had to change my ways

But, as the weight piled on, my health problems stacked up.

I stopped going out with my friends.

For the most part, I stopped going out at all.

It was agony to just walk across the lounge.

Even to get out of bed.

And as I glared at my reflection in the mirror, I felt so angry with myself for letting this happen.

A size 32, I was enormous for my 5ft 5in frame.

Just then, I heard a voice in my head.

‘Do you want to die?’ it asked.

Loud and clear.

I wanted to scream.

‘No!’ I cried out loud. ‘I want to live.’

It was time to change.

So the following week, I turned up for my first ever Slimming World meeting.

My mum Paula, then 57, had lost 5st with them in the past.

‘You’ve got to start somewhere, love,’ she said.

Waddling in alone, with my stick, sweat dripped down my back. I was terrified.

Everyone was friendly, but I was dreading the weigh-in.

The last time I’d been weighed, 18 months before, I’d been 28 stone.

I knew I’d gained since.

Stepping on the scales, the number kept rising.

And rising.

Finally it stopped: 31st 6lb.

I wanted the ground to swallow me up.

‘You’ll never see that number again,’ the consultant assured me.

Stepping on the scales, the number kept rising, and rising

Arms filled with leaflets and information, I headed home, feeling determined.

The takeaways, the family-sized chocolate bars, huge bags of crisps, were out.

Replaced with bowls of fruit and Greek yogurt.

I experimented with recipes from the Slimming World cookbook, like bacon and egg muffins.

In the first week, I lost 13lb.

Couldn’t believe it.

‘Your weight loss will slow down as you go on,’ the consultant warned.

She was right.

Some weeks I lost less, others I even gained, but by April 2022 I’d lost 3st 13lb.

That’s when I had a call from my doctor.

He’d put my name down for a gastric sleeve two years before.

I’d forgotten all about it, but a spot had come up.

‘Yes please,’ I told him.

The surgery two months later involved removing about 80% of my stomach.

Leaving it the size and shape of a banana.

words

I was 31st and so unhappy

congratulations
17 stone
let's celebrate

Feeling fab, with my 17st Slimming World certificate

It was drastic and irreversible – but it felt like a second chance.

After five days in hospital, I was allowed home.

Moved in with my sister Louise, then 35, to help me.

For the first few days, all I could eat was liquidised food.

'How is it?' Louise cringed, as I tried a few spoonfuls of liquid Sunday dinner.

'Who doesn't like blended roast chicken?' I said, trying not to gag.

Gradually, I could eat tiny portions of solid food, but nothing greasy or spicy.

A week after the op, I'd dropped 9lb.

Before long, I stopped using my walking stick.

I started putting my headphones on and going for long walks.

Took up strength training at the gym, lifting weights.

Two years after that little voice gave me a big kick, I was down to 17st 8lb.

I no longer had sleep apnoea, or pain in my feet.

I had more energy, too.

I ditched my baggy leggings, started wearing stylish blazers and shirts.

In February 2024, I met Chris, then 37, through a friend.

I told him about my weight loss.

He asked to see a picture of me when I was bigger.

For a second, I wasn't sure. *Would it put him off?*

But he beamed.

'You're an inspiration,' he said.

Now we cook healthy meals together.

Losing weight has made me face up to the reasons behind my overeating.

Through group therapy, I've learnt that I ate to compensate for feelings of sadness and low self-esteem.

I'm slowly working through this.

The biggest downside to losing weight is all the saggy skin I've been left with. Loose flaps of flesh hang from my tummy and arms.

It's worse in the summer as I can't wear vests or shorts – sweating away in long-sleeved tops and trousers instead.

The areas under the flaps get sore and sometimes infected.

I'd love to have the skin removed, but I've twice been refused surgery on the NHS.

And a private surgeon quoted me £20,000.

I just can't afford that so I've set up a GoFundMe page, hoping to raise money towards this final step.

I'm so proud of what I've achieved.

At 13st 8lb, and a size 16, I've lost almost 18st.

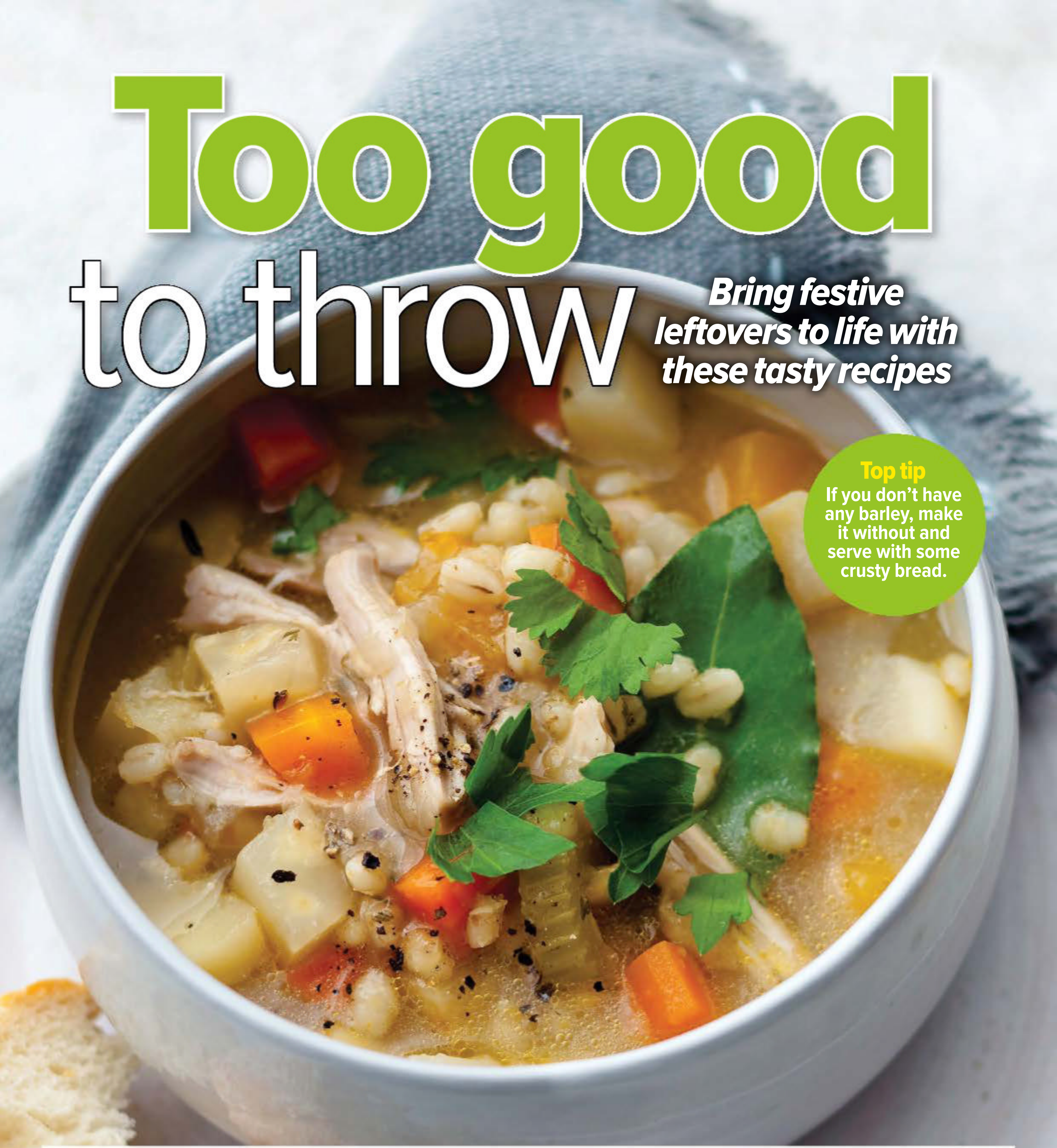
The size of a large man.

But, I gained one in return!

See Sarah's fundraising page at: gofundme.com/f/medical-cost-towards-life-changing-surgery.

Too good to throw

Bring festive leftovers to life with these tasty recipes



Top tip
If you don't have any barley, make it without and serve with some crusty bread.

Turkey and barley soup

Warming and hearty, this bowl of goodness makes the perfect lunch.

***SERVES** 6*
***PREP** 20 MINS*
***COOK** 30 MINS*

- 400ml chicken or turkey stock
- 1 large onion, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 bay leaves
- A few sprigs of thyme or rosemary
- 1kg mixed winter veg – we used carrot, swede, celeriac and parsnip
- 2 sticks of celery, finely chopped
- 100g pearl barley
- 600g cooked turkey, shredded
- Small bunch parsley, chopped, to garnish

1 Bring the stock to a boil, add the onion and herbs, and simmer for 10 mins. Add all the vegetables, bring back to the boil, then stir in the barley.

2 Reduce the heat, cover and simmer for about 20 mins. Add most of the turkey and cook for a further 10 mins or until the vegetables are tender.

3 Season and ladle into bowls. Top with the remaining turkey, sprinkle with parsley and serve with bread, if liked.

PER SERVING:** 465 **CALS,** 33g **FAT,** 15g **SAT FAT,** 20g **CARBS

Boxing Day risotto

This one-pot meal will transform Christmas cold cuts into a delicious dinner.

SERVES 4
PREP 20 MINS
COOK 40 MINS

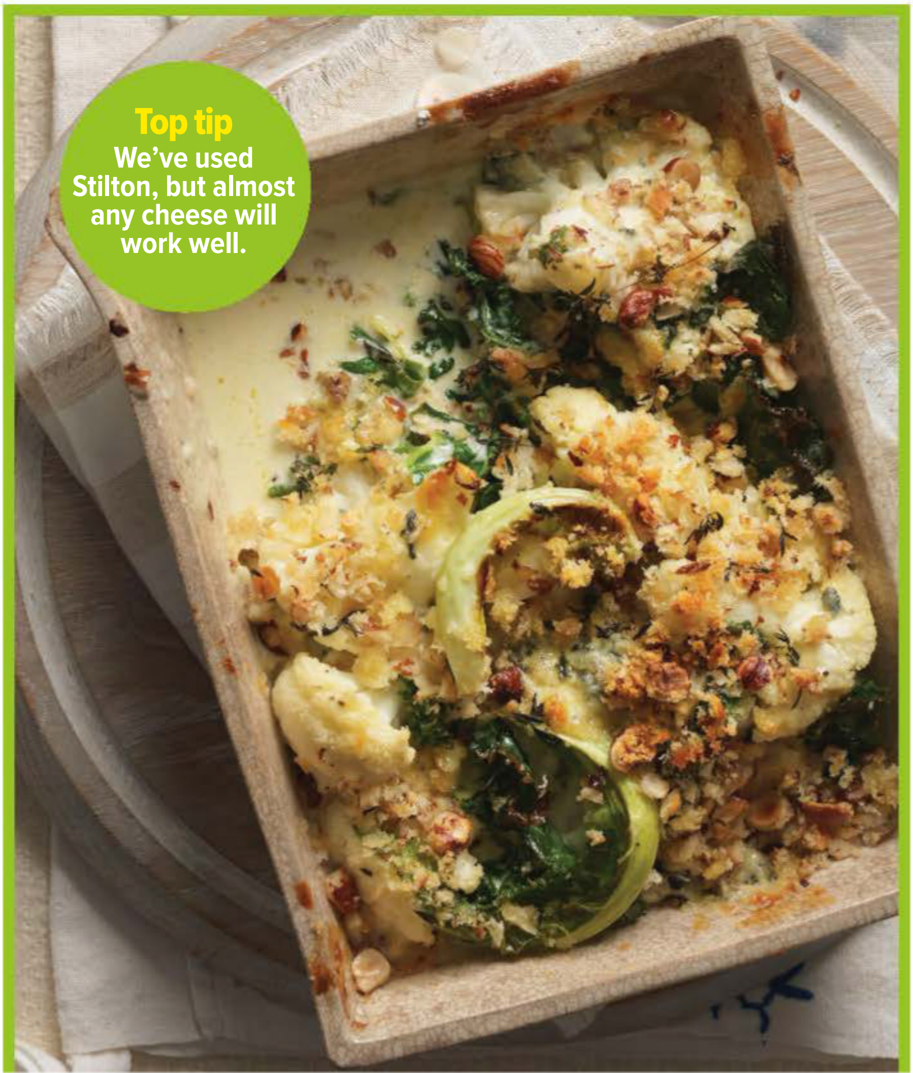
Top tip
Use whatever meat you have, turkey or beef would also work.

- 2tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 500g leeks, sliced
- 150g leftover ham
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 300g risotto rice
- 2 chicken stock pots
- 125g kale
- 60g Parmesan, grated

1 Heat the oven to 180C Fan/Gas 6. Add the oil to the casserole and fry the onion and leeks for 10 mins. Stir in the ham, garlic, rice, stock pots and 1ltr of boiling water. Season and cover.

2 Cook in the oven for 30 mins. Then add the kale and return to the oven for a further 5 mins. Stir in the cheese and serve.

PER SERVING: 593 CALS, 24g FAT, 9g SAT FAT, 71g CARBS



Top tip
We've used Stilton, but almost any cheese will work well.

Cauliflower and spinach bake

Make yesterday's vegetables mouthwatering in a cheesy sauce.

SERVES 4
PREP 20 MINS
COOK 30 MINS

- 1 large cauliflower, trimmed and cut into florets
- 100g spinach
- 50g ciabatta bread, stale if possible
- 30g hazelnuts, toasted and chopped
- 2tbsp olive oil
- 1tsp thyme leaves
- 100g Stilton, crumbled
- 300ml half-fat crème fraiche

1 Heat the oven to 160C Fan/Gas 4. Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil and cook the cauliflower for 3 mins. Add the spinach and cook for a further 1 min. Run under cool water and drain. Spread out in a medium-sized oven dish.

2 To make the topping, whizz the bread in a food processor to make coarse breadcrumbs. Combine with the hazelnuts, olive oil, thyme and seasoning to taste. Mix in 25g of the Stilton and set aside.

3 Put the crème fraiche and remaining Stilton in a pan and warm through until the cheese has melted. Pour over the vegetables and scatter over the breadcrumb topping. Bake for 30 mins until golden and bubbling.

PER SERVING: 465 CALS, 33g FAT, 15g SAT FAT, 20g CARBS

COMPILED BY: GEORGIA SPARKS. RECIPES AND PHOTOS: FUTURECONTENTHUB.COM

This week's TV

Our top telly picks – you'll kick yourself if you miss them

Vera

ITV1 ● The crime drama is coming to an end, but before Brenda Blethyn hangs up the trademark hat and coat of DCI Vera Stanhope, there are more murders to solve in the 14th and final two-part series. In the first episode, the detective has two high-profile cases to tackle, while in the second she investigates a girl's disappearance and the brutal killing of a student. But as Vera once again proves why she's the best at what she does, a life-affecting change is heading her way. Also look out for the documentary *Vera... Farewell Pet*, which features behind-the-scenes footage, contributions from the cast and a look back at the show's 13-year history.

Will Vera clear her final caseload?

Trust no one...

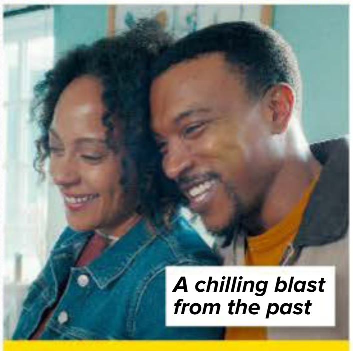
The Traitors

BBC1 ● As the reality show returns for a third series, Claudia Winkleman hosts as a group of strangers arrive at a beautiful castle in the Scottish Highlands to play the ultimate game of detection, backstabbing and betrayal. Hidden among them are the Traitors, whose job is to 'murder' their fellow players without getting caught. Meanwhile, it's up to the other players – the Faithful – to work out who the Traitors are and banish them from the game before they become the next victims. Any surviving Faithfuls can win up to £120,000, but if a Traitor remains at the end, they get to swipe the cash.

Gladiators Celebrity Special

BBC1 ● A new series of the hit sports game show is on the way, but in the meantime there's this one-off special. Celebrities Rob Beckett, Ellie Taylor, Louise Minchin and Joel Dommett take on the mighty Gladiators in a series of physically tough challenges before going head to head in the iconic Eliminator.

Thrown to the lions?


A chilling blast from the past

Harlan Coben's Missing You

NETFLIX ● Based on another of the American novelist's mysteries, this five-parter follows detective Kat Donovan (Rosalind Eleazar) who gets the shock of her life when she spots her supposedly missing fiancé Josh (Ashley Walters) on a dating app. The cast also includes James Nesbitt, Sir Lenny Henry and former *EastEnders* star Jessica Plummer.

COMING SOON

What's in store in the months ahead...

Mums is the word

Amandaland

BBC1 ● Lucy Punch reprises her role as *Motherland*'s Amanda in this comedy spin-off, which follows the newly divorced posh mum as she deals with downsizing and raising teenage kids. Also back are Dame Joanna Lumley as Amanda's mother Felicity and Philippa Dunne as her fellow parent and minion Anne.

Pete Wicks: For Dogs' Sake

U&W ● Join the *Strictly* star as he works with the UK's leading dog welfare charity Dogs Trust in this four-part series. Pete will have an instrumental role in the canines' rehabilitation process, from the moment they are rescued right up to when they are safely and happily rehomed.

Pete takes a lead-ing role

A surprise awaits Suki and Eve

SOAP SHOCKER

EastEnders

BBC1 ● As their wedding day approaches, Eve and Suki enjoy a joint hen do but what they don't realise is that Nish is back and lurking about. So when their big day arrives, will the couple tie the knot or will the evil Mr Panesar ruin their nuptials?

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WORDS: MICHAEL DARLING. PHOTOS: BBC, ITV, NETFLIX, UKTV

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28 Dec 2024-3 Jan 2025

Your STARS

***Chat* astrologer Sally Trotman reads your week ahead**

Aries

21 March-20 April

Stay focused on long-term plans to maximise your chance of success. You know what you want, so use your fiery energy to make your dreams reality.

● **Call 0905 817 0690* for more**

Taurus

21 April-21 May

To feel more freedom, try taking up a hobby or visiting a new place. Even finding a different route to work will help you feel less shackled to your routine.

● **Call 0905 817 0691* for more**

Gemini

22 May-21 June

You generally favour logic over intuition, but something feels off kilter and you need to honour these feelings. By trusting your intuition you will take a shortcut.

● **Call 0905 817 0692* for more**

Cancer

22 June-23 July

Say yes to new invitations and opportunities. It's time to shine in the lead-up to the Full Moon in Cancer mid-month, and you have what it takes to succeed.

● **Call 0905 817 0693* for more**

Leo

24 July-23 Aug

Be honest about your true feelings with someone you trust. When you share what's on your mind, you'll feel a weight lifted and know which direction to head in.

● **Call 0905 817 0694* for more**

Virgo

24 Aug-23 Sep

Instead of fearing the worst, assert your needs and be clear about your expectations. You can have whatever you want with a little more confidence.

● **Call 0905 817 0695* for more**

Libra

24 Sep-23 Oct

Get organised and focus on your priorities. It's easy to be distracted from those important goals, so find ways of spending time on what means the most to you.

● **Call 0905 817 0696* for more**

Scorpio

24 Oct-22 Nov

Have faith in yourself and your plans, because you can achieve whatever you set your mind to. Remember that you are a powerful soul and the sky's the limit.

● **Call 0905 817 0697* for more**

Sagittarius

23 Nov-21 Dec

Mercury in Sagittarius helps you speak your truth and be heard. Ideas that come to you are divinely guided, so act when you feel inspired and watch the magic unfold.

● **Call 0905 817 0698* for more**

Capricorn

22 Dec-20 Jan

The New Moon in your sign on 30 December offers the opportunity to create a solid plan for the year ahead. Base it on structure and routine for the best results.

● **Call 0905 817 0699* for more**

Aquarius

21 Jan-19 Feb

Make the most of the last few days of Venus in your sign by trying a new approach to work or your social network to include more like-minded friends.

● **Call 0905 817 0700* for more**

Pisces

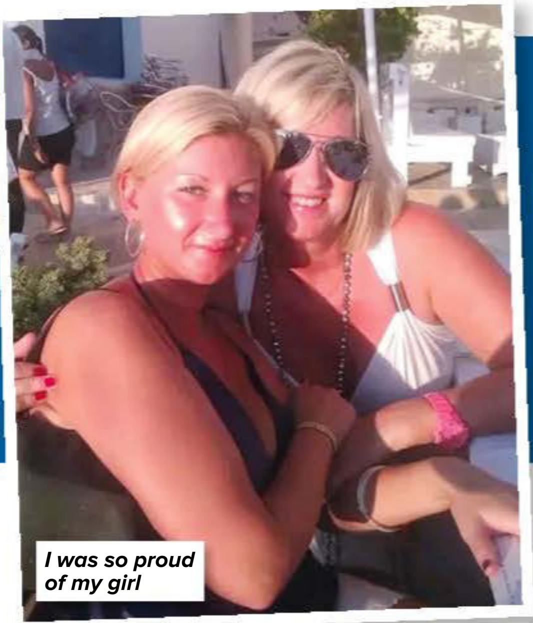
20 Feb-20 March

Venus arrives on 3 January, helping you to trust your inner guidance when it comes to love and money. Go with your hunch and know that all will be well.

● **Call 0905 817 0701* for more**

*STARLINES UPDATED EVERY THURSDAY. CALLS COST 80P PER MIN PLUS YOUR TELEPHONE COMPANY'S NETWORK ACCESS CHARGE AND LAST AROUND 4 MINS. FOR ENTERTAINMENT PURPOSES ONLY. USERS MUST BE OVER 18. YOU MUST HAVE THE BILL PAYER'S PERMISSION. SP: SPOKE 0333 202 3390.

PHOTO: ELIZABETH KEATES. SALLYTROTMAN.COM



I was so proud of my girl

Stolen f

My daughter's road to recovery led to de

Janice Parker-Cass, 63, Middlesbrough

As tears welled in my daughter's blue eyes, I wished I could do something to take away her pain.

'I just feel so sad,' she told me, staring down at her cup of tea.

It felt like no time had passed since Laura was born.

I remembered her being a toddler, running around with pretty pink bows in her golden curly pigtails.

Back then I could take her tears away with a cuddle or a bag of sweeties.

Now, it wasn't that easy.

It was 2015, Laura was 33, a teaching assistant and a mother of two.

But her marriage had just fallen apart and my mum Joan had recently died, aged 84, and she was heartbroken about it all.

'We'll get through this together,' I promised, giving her a hug.

But time passed and Laura only seemed sadder.

A few months later, I got a call from the kids' school, where Laura also worked.

'Laura called in sick today and no one has arrived to pick up the children,' the receptionist said.

I raced 15 minutes down the road to Laura's house, found her asleep.

Drunk.

I'd noticed she'd been drinking more since the marriage break-up, but this was bad.

'It'll never happen again, Mum,' Laura promised later, once I'd got the kids home and she'd sobered up.

Instead, her drinking got worse.

Laura confessed that she was going through a litre of vodka a day.

Taking codeine tablets for an old back injury, too.

Admitted to hospital after one drinking episode, I went to visit.

'This can't carry on,' I told her.

'I'm going to stop,' she promised.

But she couldn't.

She lost her job, the kids were being cared for by relatives.

Her life was unravelling before my eyes.

'Laura love, please go to rehab,' I begged. 'If not for you, then for me and the kids.'

Eventually she agreed.

'I need to do this, Mum,' she said.

In January 2018 she checked into rehab.

When she was little, I could take her tears away

When I visited, I saw the old Laura return.

She was putting on weight, her eyes sparkled.

'I'm so proud of you,' I told her.

Two months into her stay, on another visit, she introduced me to a friend.

'This is Jonathon,' she told me.

She was covered in bruises, said a wardrobe fell on her

Despite relationships being forbidden in rehab, Laura told me they were together.

I wasn't happy.

I told the staff and they said they would keep an eye on things.

But Laura laughed at my worries.

'He makes me happy. He's a nice guy, Mum,' she said.

After four months, Laura returned home.

I felt so proud of her for beating her addiction.

Only, Jonathon was out of rehab, too.

Laura visited his flat, and within weeks she went off radar.

Stopped answering her phone to me.

I found out she was drinking again.

I was distraught and blamed Jonathon.

Especially because she'd previously told me he'd bragged about going to jail for armed robbery.

'He's bad news,' I told Laura, but I couldn't get through to her.

She moved in with him.

They'd get drunk together and argue.

Then, in July 2018, Laura called me from hospital.

'What happened?' I asked, rushing to her bedside.

She was covered in bruises.

'A wardrobe fell on me,' she replied.

I felt sure Jonathon had something to do with it, but Laura wouldn't say.

Went back home to him.

Soon after, she came to a Slimming World meeting with me.

Her phone rang constantly.

Jonathon.

'Why is he calling so much?' I asked.

'He just wants to know where I am because he loves me,' she replied.

I didn't think it was love, I thought it was controlling.

I begged Laura to leave, over and over.

'He's going to kill you one of these days,' I said.

Laura shook her head.

'You don't know him like I do,' she said. 'He's really kind underneath.'

But their rows continued.

In August 2018, Laura finally saw sense.

She came over to mine and opened up.

'I want to stop drinking,' she said. 'For good this time.'

When she told me that she wanted a fresh start away from Jonathon, my heart soared.

Soon after, she found her own place.

We started spending more time together.

Going shopping, having coffee, just like the old days.

On 24 August 2018, Laura told me she was going to pick up some belongings from Jonathon's flat.

'Don't worry, he won't be in,' she told me. 'I'll be fine.'

'Be careful,' I replied.

For the next few days, I didn't hear from Laura.

Assumed she was busy moving.

uture

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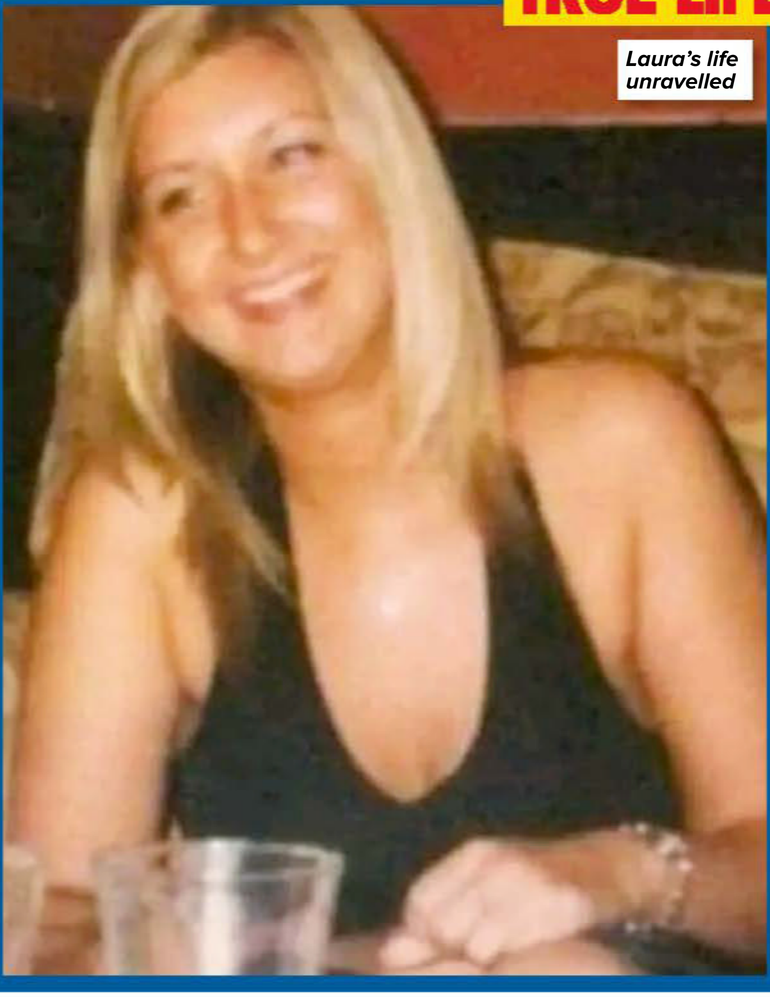
Laura's life unravelled

The following Wednesday I sent her a text.

Still on for Slimming World tomorrow?

Soon after, my phone beeped in reply.

Only, the message wasn't from her.

Instead, it was my brother.

Laura's dead, the message said.

I stared at the words on my screen, couldn't take them in.

Next thing I knew, my brother had arrived, guided me into his car and driven me to his house.

There police were waiting.

'We believe Laura was murdered,' an officer said.

My heart was racing.

'It was him, wasn't it?' I asked.

Officers confirmed Jonathon had been arrested after Laura's body was found in his blood-soaked flat.

Two days later he was charged with murder.

In October 2018 we held Laura's funeral.

The church was full as Laura's coffin arrived in a white, horse-drawn carriage.

She was later buried with my mum Joan and dad Lenny, who she'd always adored.

Saying goodbye to my beautiful girl, my best friend, was the hardest thing I'd ever had to do.

And it broke my heart to know her own kids would grow up without their mummy.

After that, months passed in a blur.

I was desperate to find out what happened to my girl, but nothing could've prepared me for the truth.

In July 2019, Jonathon Robinson, then 32, appeared at Leeds Crown Court, where he pleaded not guilty to Laura's murder.

He claimed Laura had sustained fatal injuries by falling off a bed.

But the court heard that Laura had been in the flat for five days while Robinson had beaten, stabbed and strangled her.

She'd suffered repeated blows to the head, leaving her brain damaged.

On 29 August 2018, she died, aged just 36.

Soon after her death, Robinson launched another 'frenzied' attack.

An examination of her body found countless injuries including 17 stab wounds to her buttocks.

It was harrowing.

The jury found him guilty, but when he heard the verdict, he just smirked.

Evil.

Robinson was sentenced to life in jail, with a minimum of 21 years.

Going to rehab was supposed to be the start of a new life

Judge Mr Justice Spencer said that Laura's injuries suggested Robinson may have inflicted them for 'sadistic pleasure'.

'She only ever saw the good in people. Her tragic misfortune was to meet you. The depth of her family's loss is unfathomable,' the judge said.

I was heartbroken to learn that Robinson had a long list of previous convictions, many involving violence.

Now I'm campaigning for Laura's Law, to prevent mixed rehab centres.

When my daughter met that monster, she was at her most vulnerable.

Yet she was placed with a violent criminal, who stole her heart and her future.

Going to rehab was supposed to be the start of a new life.

Instead, it was the end.

WORDS: ALEX MEYER, SARA LAIN. ROBINSON PHOTO: CLEVELAND POLICE

Robinson had bragged about going to jail

I've planted a tree in Laura's memory

WANT TO HELP?
To sign Janice's petition, visit change.org/p/the-government-st0p-mixing-rehabs-vunerable-women-should-not-mix-with-abusive-men.

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The answers to all but one of these quiz questions can be found hidden in this wordsearch grid, reading forwards, backwards, up, down or diagonally. To help you, we'll tell you that the answers are in alphabetical order in each section. However, one answer can't be found in the grid. This is your prize answer.

ROBIN HOOD

1 Who performed *(Everything I do) I Do It for You*, the theme song to *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*? (5,5)

2 Who directed the 2010 film *Robin Hood*, starring Russell Crowe in the title role, as well as the films *Black Hawk Down* and *The Martian*? (6,5)

3 Robin Hood's Bay is a coastal village 6 miles south of Whitby in the county of North _? (9)

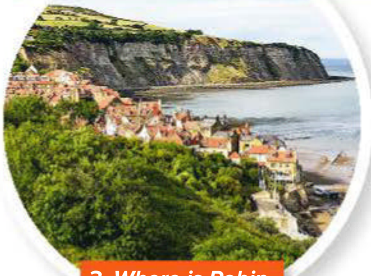
LITTLE JOHN

4 Nick Brimble, who played Little John in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, plays Jack Chapman in which ITV detective drama, set in 1950s Cambridgeshire? (12)

5 John McMorris, whose stage name is Little John, is a dance hall musician born in Kingston, the capital of which country? (7)

6 What is the surname of Ving, who has appeared in the films *Little John, Pulp Fiction* and *Mission: Impossible II*? (6)

PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK, GETTY



3. Where is Robin Hood's Bay?

FRIAR TUCK

7 Mike McShane, who played Friar Tuck in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves,* was known for appearing on the improvisational comedy series *Whose Line Is It* _? (6)

8 In the 1973 animated film *Robin Hood*, Friar Tuck was depicted as what type of nocturnal mammal that lives in a sett? (6)

9 Which Australian comedian played Friar Tuck in the 2018's *Robin Hood* and wrote the stage musicals *Matilda the Musical* and *Groundhog Day*? (3,7)

MAID MARIAN

10 Which supermodel, who played Maid Marian in *Blackadder: Back & Forth,* was knocked into the Thames by Eddie in *Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie*? (4,4)

11 Tony Robinson played the villainous sheriff of which East Midlands city in the children's TV series *Maid Marian and her Merry Men*, which he also wrote? (10)

12 Robin Hood (as Robin Wood) and Maid Marian appear in TH White's 1938 Arthurian novel *The Sword in the* _? (5)

MERRY MEN

13 Howard Lew Lewis' character in *Maid Marian and Her Merry Men* shares his name with which disease, also called hydrophobia and often associated with dog bites? (6)

14 What is the surname of Robin Hood's companion Will, as played by Christian Slater in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*? (8)

15 What is the surname of Sam, who played Much in the 2006-2009 series *Robin Hood*, and his grandfather Patrick, who played the second Doctor in *Doctor Who*? (9)

1. The singer of the theme song

Your answer:

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YOU LITTLE Beauty

Your questions answered, plus our pick of the products

LETTER of the week!

Q How do you actually use a highlighter? I don't want to look sweaty!
Edie Douglas, 59, Exeter

A If you're heading 'out out' this New Year's Eve, you'll want to add a bit of sparkle. The key with highlighter is to go for something glassy and sheeny, not shimmery and glittery, which can add years. Concentrate highlighter on the high points of the face – temples, brow bone, cheekbones and a touch on the Cupid's bow. Always apply in natural light if you can to help prevent streaks – you want everything to be blended seamlessly. **E.l.f. Jelly Pop Glow Stick, £8, elfcosmetics.co.uk,** comes in a handy solid stick. Dab where you need then buff out with your fingertip. Or there's **Make Up Gallery Glow The Distance Highlighter, £2.50, Poundland,** a cream illuminator with ingredients like hyaluronic acid and shea butter. **Collection Diamond Shine Pink Highlighter, £5.99, Boots,** is a blusher-cum-highlighter. Swirl over the fullest part of the cheek for a radiant rosy flush.

WORDS: STEPHANIE MAYLOR. PHOTO (POSED BY MODEL): GETTY

BARGAIN BUYS

Body Stories Revitalise Face Cream, £2.50, Poundland
If you're looking for a rich moisturiser to replenish winter-worn skin, this is a dream cream. It's infused with well-known moisturising ingredients like hyaluronic acid and vitamins C and E, known to quench dehydrated skin, all for less than the price of a takeaway coffee.

PS... Pro Ultimate Neutrals Eyeshadow Palette, £5, Primark
This is the most wearable, covetable selection of eyeshadows we've come across. The 12-strong palette features a mix of suits-all neutrals in matte and shimmer finishes that will take you from day to night, subtle to smoky. It's incredible value and works out at just 42p per eyeshadow.

TRIED AND TESTED

Hask Argan Oil Repairing Hair Oil, £5.99, justmylook.com
Great for dry, damaged hair prone to frizz, this leave-in oil repairs and restores. Apply a small amount to damp hair before styling or smooth sparingly through dry hair to create a silky finish.

Catrice Cosmetics Creamy Nudes Lip Pen, £3.79, justmylook.com
Channel the 90s with this curated collection of nude lip colours. The precise pencil doubles up as your liner and lipstick in one. There are five luscious neutrals to choose from, each with a creamy formula that glides across lips.

Braid & Bow Crystal Bow Hair Clip, £8.90, braidandbow.com
Add the perfect finishing touch to your hairdo this New Year's Eve (and beyond!) with this beautiful bejewelled bow. There's a whole host of styles to choose from – the worst part will be having to decide!

B. Rosehip Cleansing Balm, £9.99, Superdrug
Winter is the perfect time to switch out light, foaming cleansers for something more indulgent and nourishing. This balm melts away make-up, leaving skin quenched and smelling wonderful.

Westlab Deep Sleep Bath Salts, £5.99, Sainsbury's
Calm a busy mind and prepare for a good night's sleep with these soothing lavender and cedarwood bath salts. Sprinkle 1-2 cups of salt in a warm bath and soak for up to 20 minutes.

Got a beauty question? Send your problems to chat_magazine@futurenet.com

6 things to do in...

Delft

This pretty Dutch city is criss-crossed with canals and full of historic sights

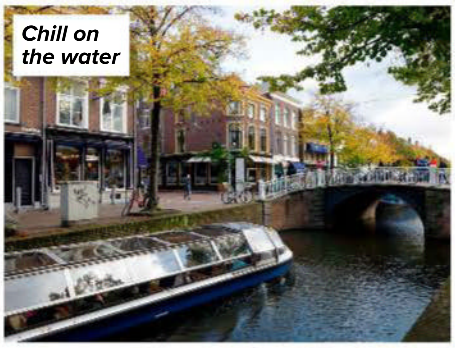
See history you can hold

1 Delft Blue

Delft is famous the world over for its delicate porcelain china. The Royal Delft museum (museum.royaldelft.com/en) tells the brand's 400-year-old history, with glass cases stacked with hand-painted and gold-leaf wares, including dinner services owned by King William III. You can also go behind the scenes at its factory to see skilled potters at work. After, take tea in the courtyard garden, where the crockery is as pretty as the cakes.

2 Canal cruise

Take a cruise the Oude canal, the city's oldest waterway. It's a relaxing way to see Delft's leafy streets, lined with handsome, skinny merchant houses. You'll also pootle around Kolk harbour, made famous in a 17th-century painting (*View of Delft*) by Dutch master, Jan Vermeer, who was born here. Fancy something more lively? Splash around the canals on a stand-up paddleboard or hire your own dinghy.



Chill on the water

Head for the heights

3 Church view

The second tallest tower (110m high) in the Netherlands belongs to Delft's New Church (which isn't really new, as it was built in 1351). On clear days, it's worth tackling the 376 steps to the top for panoramic views over the city. Delft also has an Old Church, known to locals as 'Leaning John', thanks to its wonky tower.

WORDS: CHRIS MORLEY. PHOTOS: ALAMY, GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK, STADS-KOFFYHUIS. DETAILS CORRECT AT TIME OF WRITING

4 Loaded pancakes

Make a pit stop at one of Delft's popular pancake houses. At Stads Koffyhuis (stads-koffyhuis.nl) the menu groans with goodies, including savoury options, like pancakes with bacon, leek and cheese. For a sweet feast, try the pancakes laden with stewed apple, cinnamon ice cream and whipped cream.

Try sweet and savoury delights

STADS KOFFY HUIS

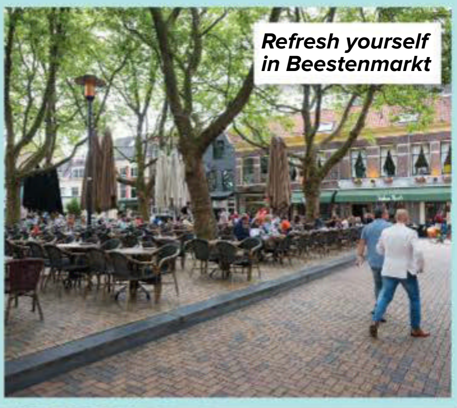
5 Working windmill

Back in the day, Delft's skyline was whirring with windmills (it had 18). Now there's only one left, Molen de Roos (molenderoos.nl), which is still busy grinding grain into flour. It's open to visitors, so you can watch the millers at work, buy bread from the shop and enjoy city views from the mill's upper deck.

Breeze into a unique bakery

6 Say 'proost'!

Back in the 15th century, there were 200 breweries within the city walls, so Delft knows a thing or two about beer. You can sample local ales and lagers all over the city, but if it's sunny, enjoy a glass sitting in a leafy square, like Beestenmarkt or Brouwplein (where all the breweries were once located). And don't forget to say 'proost!' (cheers) when you raise a glass!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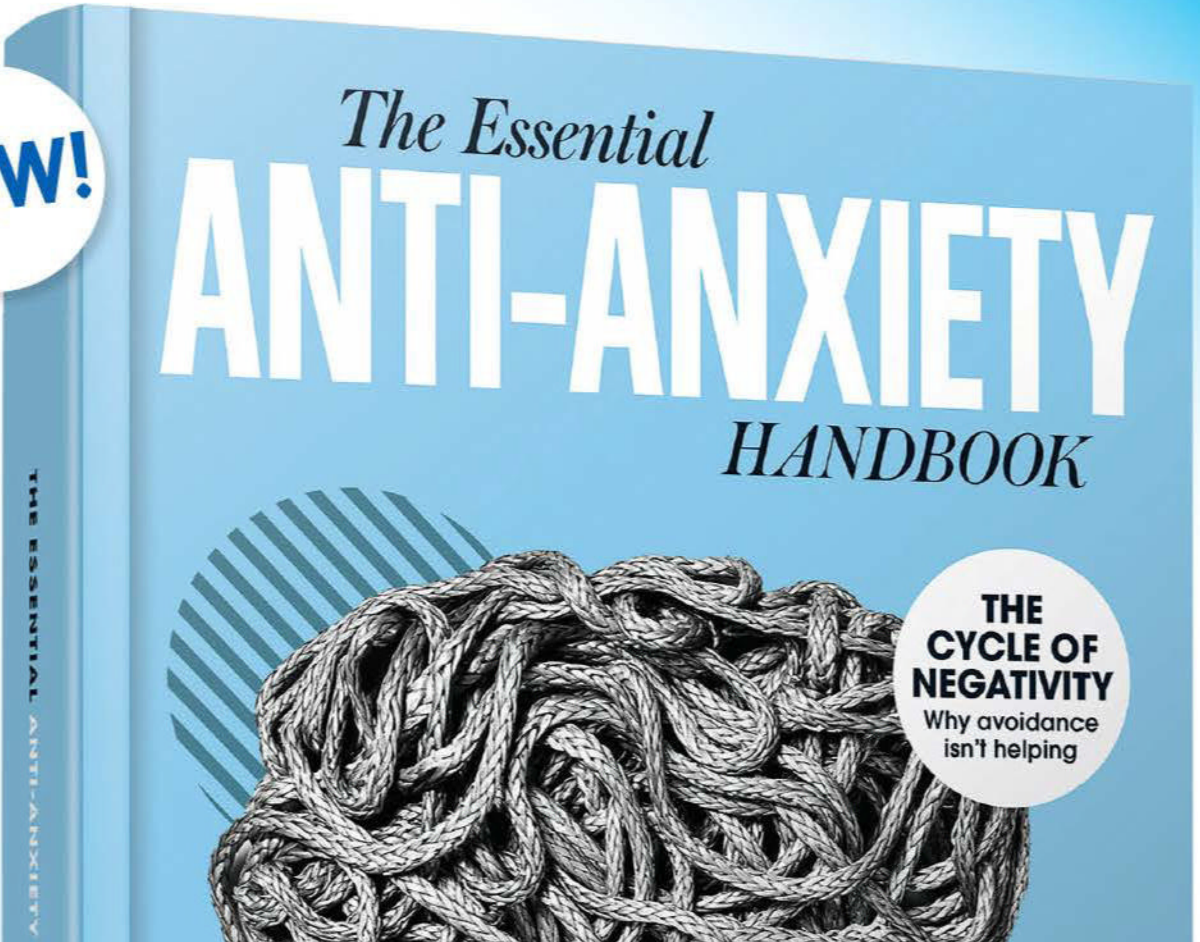
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BEHIND THE BIG CRIME

Final cou

As midnight approached in Tooele, Utah, partygoers gathered.

It was New Year's Eve 2017.

Everyone celebrated with fireworks, cheers and bubbly.

But the families of two local teens were worried.

Brelynne 'Breezy' Otteson, 17, and her boyfriend Riley Powell, 18, hadn't been in touch.

Breezy loved a party.

She'd recently celebrated Christmas with family.

Sporty too, she shared a passion for basketball with her boyfriend Riley.

A boy with a 'big heart' and 'shy smile'.

The pair hadn't been heard from since 29 December.

And, as the new year began with no 'happy new year' texts, their families reported them missing.

There were fears that they'd gone off-roading in Riley's jeep and got into an accident.

With temperatures plummeting, their relatives joined police and volunteers in a desperate search.

The Ottesons and Powells pooled every penny to offer a $5,000 reward.

Still nothing.

Until a breakthrough on 11 January 2018.

Cops found Riley's empty jeep in a remote area near Cherry Creek Reservoir, the tyres slashed.

Warm clothes and IDs had been left inside the vehicle.

The couple should have been partying

With all signs pointing to foul play, it was Riley's dad Bill Powell who voiced the unthinkable.

'We're not finding them on the surface so they've got to be underground,' he said.

The area was home to over 800 copper, lead and silver mines, many of them disused.

The families pooled every penny to offer a reward

Could the couple be in one of them?

Detectives discovered Riley had last used his bank card on 29 December 2017.

The same day he'd phoned a woman called Morgan Lewis.

When the police traced her, she claimed she didn't know Riley.

But Facebook messages showed they'd been in touch.

Morgan Lewis' boyfriend Jerrod Baum, then 41, told police he'd heard rumours that the couple had been killed by a drug cartel.

It seemed so unlikely.

The cops were suspicious of the pair.

Weeks later, when she was pulled over for speeding on 25 March 2018, officers found weapons in Morgan Lewis' car.

Arrested and questioned, she cracked.

Told cops her boyfriend Jerrod Baum, who was already in police custody on another charge, had killed the missing couple.

She showed officers a barrel at the home she shared with Baum.

Inside were knives and broken phones.

She refused to say more but as she was transported to jail, the police vehicle passed the Tintic Standard Mine and Morgan Lewis visibly shook.

It prompted investigators to send a camera 100ft down the mineshaft.

There, a grisly discovery.

Two bodies.

Their hands tied.

Breezy and Riley.

Seeing a photo of the couple's remains, Morgan spilt it all.

Said she was afraid of Baum, who was violent and jealous.

He'd forbidden her to have male friends.

Only, she'd bumped into Riley recently.

And late on 29 December, Riley and Breezy had called round.

Coming home unexpectedly, Baum had flown into a rage.

Jerrod Baum in custody

tdown

As the new year dawned, two teens vanished

Tying up the young couple, he'd shoved them in the back of Riley's jeep.

Then driven them to the mine where he'd used a knife to kill them both.

Before hurling their bodies into the abandoned mine shaft.

He'd then forced Morgan to drive Riley's jeep to Cherry Creek, while he went in his truck.

When they got there, he slashed the jeep tyres.

The police charged Baum with kidnapping and murdering Breezy and Riley.

The bodies being recovered

Their families' worst nightmare.

In April 2022, Jerrod Baum, then 45, stood trial.

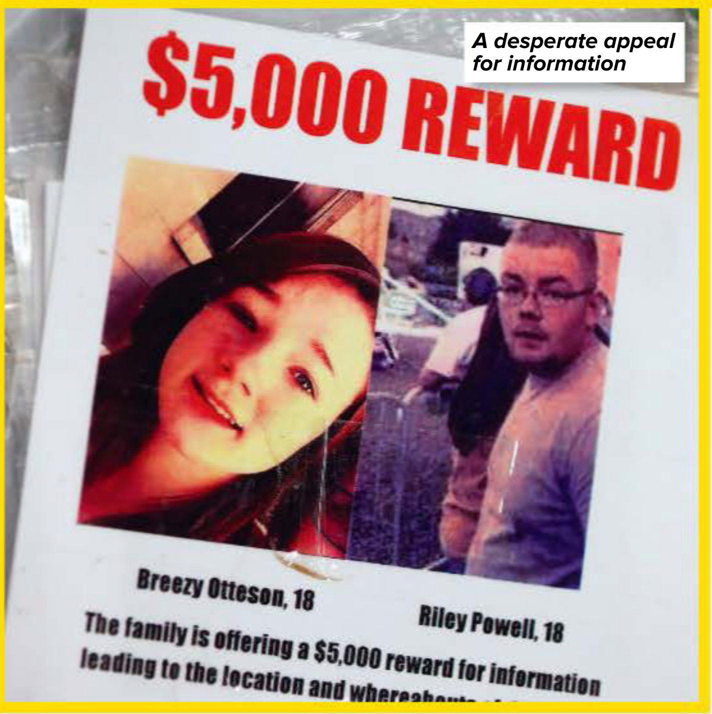
He faced numerous charges, including aggravated murder, aggravated kidnapping and abuse or desecration of a human body in the deaths of Breezy Otteson, 17, and Riley Powell, 18.

He denied it all.

The prosecution brought out a witness.

Morgan Lewis.

She'd agreed to a plea deal where she'd get a shorter sentence if she testified against her ex.



A desperate appeal for information

$5,000 REWARD

Breezy Otteson, 18

Riley Powell, 18

The family is offering a $5,000 reward for information leading to the location and whereab

Morgan told the court she'd only invited Riley and Breezy over on 29 December because Baum was out.

But he'd caught them and bound the teens with duct tape, before instructing her to get in the jeep too.

She knew she was in big trouble, she recalled, saying she could feel 'violence in the air'.

Out in the middle of nowhere, near the Tintic Mine, she recounted how she'd been kneeling close to Breezy when Baum had stabbed Riley in the head, chest, stomach and crotch.

'He was silent, then all of a sudden he said, "I'm dying,"' Morgan told the court. 'It sounded like he was drowning, it was the most terrible noise.'

Morgan said that Baum had then turned to Breezy and cut her throat.

'There was so much blood,' Morgan told the court.

Said she'd prepared to die too, but instead Baum had told her to pull herself together.

The pair later returned home, destroyed their clothes and showered with bleach.

In the weeks after the killings, Morgan said Baum told her to update him on the search for the missing teens, including Facebook posts from devastated family members, which made him happy because 'he enjoys pain'.

While the defence argued that Morgan Lewis was an unreliable witness, Jerrod Baum was later found guilty and sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole.

Morgan said she could feel violence in the air

Morgan Lewis was sentenced to three years for her role in the killings.

Justice, but nothing could bring back Breezy and Riley.

The following year, authorities permanently sealed the mineshaft where the teens had met their terrible fate.

Once rich with glistening silver, this dark cavern is now forever tainted by horror.

Bill Powell and other relatives (front row) at a news conference in 2019

WORDS: TRACIE COUPER. PHOTOS: ALAMY, GETTY

Chat PUZZLES 1

CLOSING DATE FOR ALL ENTRIES IS 14 JANUARY 2025 (Three days later for postal entries)

PAGE 8 **Puzzle 1** £200 CASH	**PAGE 28** **Puzzle 10** £500 CASH
PAGE 8 **Puzzle 2** £100 CASH	**PAGE 28** **Puzzle 11** 2 x £30 CASH
PAGE 8 **Puzzle 3** 5 x £20 CASH	**PAGE 28** **Puzzle 12** £40 CASH
PAGE 15 **Puzzle 4** £1,001 CASH	**PAGE 30** **Puzzle 13** 4 x £20 CASH
PAGE 18 **Puzzle 5** 10 x £20 CASH	**PAGE 32** **Puzzle 14** £100 CASH
PAGE 22 **Puzzle 6** 5 x £20 CASH	**PAGE 32** **Puzzle 15** £100 CASH
PAGE 22 **Puzzle 7** 3 x £50 CASH	**PAGE 36** **Puzzle 16** 2 x £250 CASH
PAGE 22 **Puzzle 8** 3 x £50 CASH	**PAGE 36** **Puzzle 17** £75 CASH
PAGE 22 **Puzzle 9** 2 x £25 CASH	**PAGE 47** **Puzzle 18** £500 CASH

Name ....

Address ....

.... **Postcode** ....

Daytime tel no (optional) ....

PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS THROUGHOUT

HOW TO ENTER

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door number and postcode to

63333

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Texting tips

- Don't put any spaces in an answer that has several words: eg: **CHATISTHEBEST** not CHAT IS THE BEST.
- If the answer is a name, you need only give the surname: eg: **CLOONEY** not GEORGE CLOONEY.
- You can use capitals or small letters, but don't use any commas, etc.
- Leave out answers you don't wish to enter.

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comps.lifedeathprizes.com/puzzles

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0906 470 7003

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- Calls cost 65p per min plus your telephone company's network access charge. Call durations will vary between 1 and 7 minutes depending on the number of answers submitted. Please ensure you provide your full name and address details as incomplete entries may be charged but not entered. SP: Spoke 0333 202 3390

WRITE

To reply by post, fill out the coupon left with your answers and contact details and send it to,

Chat Puzzles No 1, PO Box 502,
Leicester LE94 0AB

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For back issues of Chat

WHAT'S THE ANSWER?

Solutions to *Chat* issue 47 (21 November 2024)

Puzzle 2	Linnet
Puzzle 3	Whales
Puzzle 4	I would swear too much
Puzzle 5	1C,2A,2B,3C,4B
Puzzle 6	Tine
Puzzle 7	Bass
Puzzle 8	Sara Cox
Puzzle 9	Diving board
Puzzle 10	Islamabad
Puzzle 13	Oahu
Puzzle 14	Colette
Puzzle 15	Tiber
Puzzle 16	Lattes
Puzzle 17	Sahara
Puzzle 18	Wombles

WE WON!

Chat winners issue 38 (13 Sept 2024)

Anyone from your town in the list this week..?

£1,001 CASH

DC Boxer, Enfield

£500 CASH

P Edwards, Congleton

O Wilde, Warwick

£250 CASH

R Flint, Hemel Hempstead

S Barnes, Shrewsbury

£200 CASH

CA Wilkinson, Nottingham

£100 CASH

S Park, Workington

C Kerins, Cambridge

R Moore, Southport

£50 CASH

S Flynn, Burntwood

N Jones, Stockton on Tees

C Davies, Doncaster

M Ford, Chichester

E Baldwin, Hemel Hempstead

J Whybro, Dereham

£40 CASH

F Warren, Ilford

£30 CASH

P Smedley, Hartlepool

S Golzey, Clacton on Sea

£25 CASH

L Gillespie, Liverpool

G Woodgreaves, Lowestoft

£20 CASH

B Taylor, Leicester

S Davidson, Wooler

M Lane, Bognor Regis

J Carney, Preston

N Ward, Herne Bay

K Govier, Glastonbury

M Bridge, Kington

A Walker Hyde, Milton Keynes

M Kenney, Stevenage

S Hales, Colchester

P Tuersley, London

K Chillingworth, Dereham

J Rimmer, Warrington

J Perry, Sherborne

L Bierley, Boston

J Alexander, York

N Jacobs, Northallerton

C Auld, Darvel

J Kingsbury, Brandon

P Pratlett, Strabane

G Hale, Evesham

P Jamieson, Loanhead

S Heath, Wirral

N Cridlin, Exmouth

Chat PUZZLE 1

84422

4	2	3	6	2	5	5	■	9	0	9	0	8
4	■	1	■	9	■	5	1	0	■	8	■	0
8	3	7	■	0	■	5	■	1	1	0	5	4
1	1	2	7	9	5	3	■	2	0	3	1	■
■	7	■	■	■	7	■	1	7	7	5	4	7
6	1	5	1	4	6	1	■	8	■	■	■	5
5	6	7	5	■	■	2	■	4	1	7	0	4
4	■	3	9	5	4	4	9	6	2	■	■	7
3	2	2	0	7	■	7	■	■	6	8	8	9
■	■	5	■	8	■	4	4	2	4	5	1	■
■	2	7	3	2	8	6	■	3	9	0	1	8
4	0	4	2	■	■	7	8	3	■	■	2	■
■	2	7	3	3	■	8	■	5	9	7	0	8

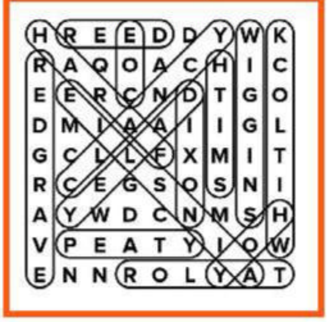
Chat PUZZLE 11

1 4 2

1	4	7	2	5	3	9	6	8
2	5	8	6	9	1	4	3	7
3	9	6	7	4	8	2	1	5
7	1	9	4	8	6	3	5	2
5	6	2	9	3	7	8	4	1
8	3	4	5	1	2	6	7	9
6	7	1	8	2	4	5	9	3
4	8	5	3	7	9	1	2	6
9	2	3	1	6	5	7	8	4

Chat PUZZLE 12

KENNY



H	R	E	E	D	D	Y	W	K
R	A	Q	O	A	C	H	I	C
E	E	R	C	N	D	T	G	O
D	M	I	A	A	I	I	G	L
G	C	L	L	F	X	M	I	T
R	C	E	G	S	O	S	N	I
A	Y	W	D	C	N	M	S	H
V	P	E	A	T	Y	I	O	W
E	N	N	R	O	L	Y	A	T

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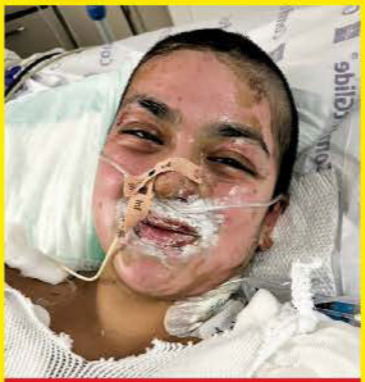
In next week's *Chat*



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A letter to...

My Mr Wrongs

I'm still on the dating scene

At least one man didn't puncture my pride

Hello boys,

I thought I'd never have to think about you again. Yet here I am, thanking each and every single one of you men who took me on terrible dates.

Because if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be where I am today.

It all started back in 2008 when I was 25 and sharing a flat with my best mate Lindsay, then 27.

Hitting the dating scene we imagined queues of eligible, charming men just waiting to sweep us off our feet.

Oh, how wrong we were!

After a year of failing to find Mr Right, we gave online dating a go.

One of my first dates was with 'Pump-it Pete'.

He owned a gym – had an incredible six-pack.

Things were going well.

Then after our first night together, I woke up at 5am with my stomach churning.

Food poisoning!

I made it to the bathroom in time.

But in our tiny flat, there was no way to hide.

I even managed to clog the toilet.

Mortifying!

Pete was sweet, but things went down the pan soon after.

Pete was sweet, but things soon went down the pan

Then there was 'Gangster Alex'.

He showed up to the restaurant in a foul mood.

Smuggled in a plastic bottle of vodka and apple juice, and kept pouring himself drinks at the table.

'You can't do that here,' I hissed.

'I can do what I want,' he snapped.

We finished dinner, parted ways, and I didn't expect to hear from him again.

But six months later, he rang.

'Hi, it's Alex,' he whispered. 'I'm in prison.'

Apparently, he'd been arrested the night of our date on drug and weapons charges.

Had been thinking about me ever since.

Creepy!

'Sorry, I've met someone else,' I fibbed and hung up.

Lindsay wasn't spared her share of bad dates either.

She once fell head over heels for a guy we called 'Gorgeous George'.

They had a magical few months together.

But his texts fizzled out.

One wine-fuelled night, Lindsay cycled over to his flat.

With no plan other than to glare up at his window from the shadows.

He was there, very much alive and clearly avoiding her.

'Not my best moment,' she admits now.

Despite the heartbreak and disappointment, Lindsay and I laughed about our bad dates.

Loved telling all the cringey stories.

'You two should write a book,' her late mum always said.

And so, one rainy afternoon in August 2018, we decided to do just that.

What started out as a joke turned into something incredible.

Now we have a book, with a second and third on the way.

There's even a podcast, *Chaos Confessions*, in the works.

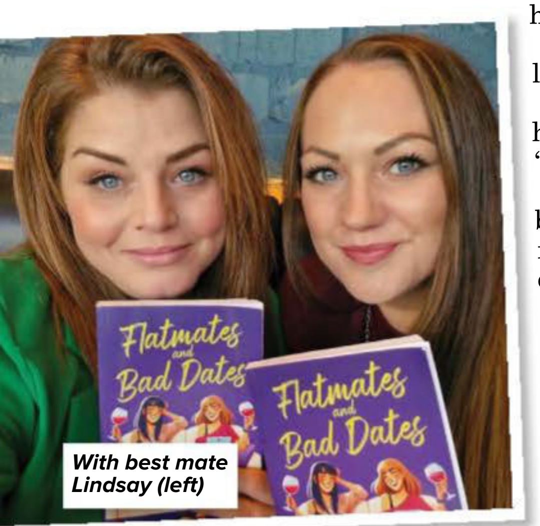
We're still single, still dating and still finding endless material.

So, thank you – to all you strange, rude and ridiculous dates.

Without you, there might never have been a book – or three!

Yours gratefully,
Helen

Helen Beau, 41, Nottingham



With best mate Lindsay (left)

***Flatmates and Bad Dates: A Hilarious Journey Through Friendship, Dating Disasters and Wine-Fuelled Adventures* by Helen Beau and Lindsay Brom is available to buy now on amazon.co.uk.**

WORDS: ELAINE HAYWARD

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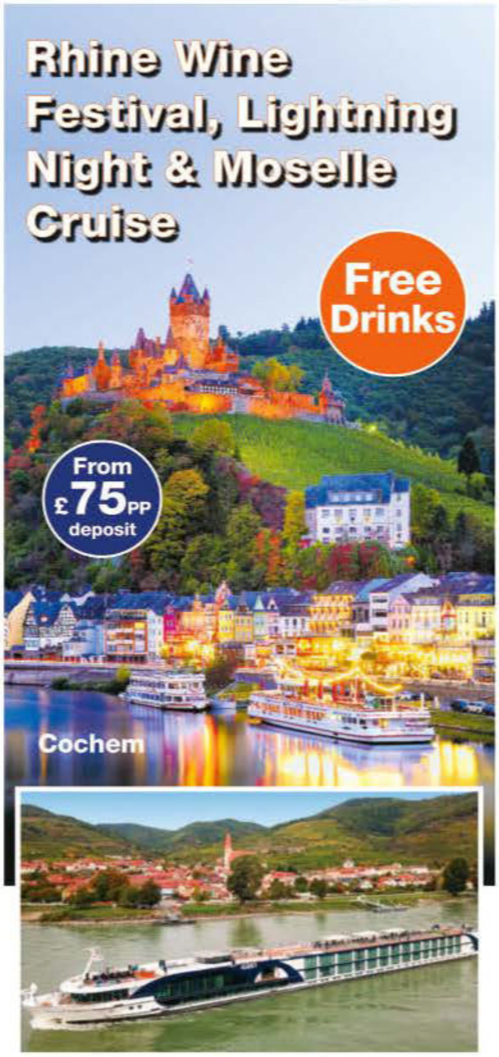

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